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Migrantes no tienen alma, migrantes solo tienen pies: Social Challenges of Returnee Women in Guatemala

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Migrantes no tienen alma, migrantes solo tienen pies:

Social Challenges of Returnee Women in Guatemala

by

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the returnee women who shared their stories with me so openly, allowing me to witness some of their deepest wounds and greatest transformations. This thesis is as much their as it is mine.

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Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Nestor Rodriguez, for helping to introduce me to the wonderful community in Guatemala that welcomed me so warmly, as well as guiding me throughout the process of investigation and writing of this thesis.

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Abstract

Migrantes no tienen alma, migrantes solo tienen pies: Social Challenges of Returnee Women in Guatemala

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Scholarship on return migration has historically focused on the return experiences of men, lacking comparison and specificity on women's experiences. This qualitative study of returnee women in Guatemala focuses on how their roles and identities as daughters, mothers, and retirees, influence their return and reintegration processes into Guatemalan society, as well as the way they make meaning of their experiences. However, regardless of generational status, returnee women face social challenges related to family separation, travel restrictions, judgments and social clashes, and family reintegration, which have a great impact on their health and well-being of their families. Finally, this thesis explores the ways the social work field can work to advocate for and provide necessary social services to help returnee women through their return and reintegration processes.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The topic of migration is all over the news these days. Recently, the public has learned about the horrors happening inside immigrant detention centers, children brutally separated from their parents, or migrant women being raped by immigrant officials. However, we don't often hear the stories of returnees, migrants who are deported or return to their country of origin. Instead, returnees become abstractions and statistics, stories that have been erased from our sight as if they never existed. While a few articles exist on the experiences of men who have been deported, the stories of returnee women seem to be non-existent in academic writing. Additionally, scholars have documented the experiences of migrants traveling north for a better future, their reasons for migrating, the hardships they face along their journey, the fear they experience about being deported upon arrival, and the sacrifices they make to provide a more stable future for themselves and their families.

My research provides a generational narrative analysis of the return and social reintegration processes of voluntary and forced returnee women in Guatemala. The thesis that guided the research is that women's roles and identities as daughters, mothers, and retirees shape the way they make meaning of their return and reintegration experiences, and influence decision-making for the well-being of themselves and their families. While every returnee woman has unique challenges related to social, economic, and legal factors, they all also share common difficulties due to historical, cultural, and sociopolitical influences. Regardless of the context through which women return to

Guatemala, reintegrating into a society from which they fled or to which they have little familiarity can be a very emotional and challenging experience.

I learned that each woman had their unique process for coping and fighting through adversity. However, it is important to mention that when I first set out to do this project, I had my own biases, thinking that returning to Guatemala meant either a death sentence or that life would simply be unbearable. While it was true each woman faced some very difficult times upon returning, they were also able to find inner strength, and create a community of support to continue moving forward. I was inspired by their unwavering optimism, their ability to see the good in people, and their desire to make changes towards a more just world. I was fortunate to listen to my participants as they shared some of the most intimate details of their stories. I hope to do their stories justice by adequately reflecting their experiences in my writing. I also hope to contribute to the social science knowledge of the experiences of migrant women.

The title of my thesis, *Migrantes no tienen alma, migrantes solo tienen pies: Social Challenges of Returnee Women in Guatemala*[1], was inspired by Camila, one of my participants, who identified as an economic exile instead of a migrant due to government repression and American intervention in Guatemala. Additionally, she shared the challenges she faced in finding spaces where she could process her emotions as a migrant and returnee. She noticed that people's perceptions of migrants were that their life in the U.S. must have been wonderful and therefore must not have any negative stories to share.

[1] The first part of the title of my thesis, "Migrantes no tienen alma, migrantes solo tienen pies," translates to "migrants do not have a soul, migrants only have feet", and was inspired by one of my participants.

Camila expressed that because returnees' psychological challenges were never discussed or addressed, many migrants lived life with unprocessed shame and embarrassment. She told me, *"[Somos exiliados económicos pero]nos ponen en el nombrecito de migrantes, caminantes verdad. Caminantes no tienen alma, caminantes solo tienen pies."* I found her statement not only inspiring, but also realized that it was a reflection of all of my participants experiences. As returnee women, they never felt fully seen by society due to public misconceptions and lack of research on the social reintegration of returnees.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

Because my research took place in the Guatemalan highlands, it was important to first situate it in the historical sociopolitical climate in which my participants lived as well as the phases of Guatemalan migration to the United States. Concerning the civil war, the 1960s and 1970s in Guatemala were characterized by the continuing domination of state power, military and business elite that were allied by U.S. economic and governmental interests. During the late 1960's a counterinsurgency campaign was supervised by the U.S. government and was directed against revolutionary insurgents in the Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (FAR). However, the reality was that the counterinsurgency war was directed towards and inflicted the most violence on civilian organizations and individuals, resulting in the killing or disappearance of 8,000 to 10,000 people in just two years Jonas and Rodriguez, (2014). Additionally, the counterinsurgency was institutionalized after an election in which only primarily Guatemalan elites voted, resulting in the enactment of Carlos Arana, who led the

insurgency, as president. Within the first five months of taking office, Arana directed more than 700 political killings that targeted reformist politicians and labor leaders and forced student leaders, professors, and intellectuals into exile (Jonas et al., 2014).

Throughout the 1970s, however, people in Guatemala, especially those in indigenous communities of the highlands began organizing against military dictatorship and repression that characterized the region since the 1950s. After 1977, the repression escalated in response to students, workers, and peasants who organized to oppose the government, and in the early 1980s the government unleashed a military counterinsurgency against revolutionary Mayan popular movements and communities. The government planned genocide that occurred between 1981 and 1983, called scorched earth, resulted in 150,000 civilians being murdered and caused in massive internal displacements and international migration into Mexico and the United States (Jonas & Rodríguez, 2014a). Jonas and Rodriguez (2014). outline five distinct phases of Guatemalan migration:

Phase 1: Fleeing Social Turmoil, 1977–1985: Due to the increase of political violence and declining economic conditions, more than 13,000 legal and undocumented Guatemalan migrants entered the U.S. per year, which served to establish a pattern of Central American Migration to the U.S.

*Phase 2: Legalization through Amnesty, 1986–1988***:** During this phase, approximately 22,800 legal and undocumented migrants entered the U.S. per year, an increase of 74 percent from phase 1. Through the Immigration Reform and Control Act

(IRCA) of 1986, which offered amnesty and the possibility of legalization for certain undocumented migrants, 49,942 Guatemalans were granted legal permanent resident status.

Phase 3: Transnational Development, 1989–1991: Taking advantage of the benefits afforded to them by their new legal status, Guatemalan migrants were now able to travel to and from Guatemala, something they were rarely able to do before their legalization due to difficulties of re-migrating without a visa.

Phase 4: Developing into Guatemalan Americans, 1992–2003: During this phase, the annual mean of legal and undocumented Guatemalan migrants dropped to 25,039 from 45,504 in phase 3, a 45% drop. However, this drop was due to new IRCA applicants were being processed as "Guatemalans Admitted". Additionally, during this phase, while immigrants from earlier phases maintained Guatemalan cultural traits, their children grew up and lived bi-culturally.

Phase 5: Inclusion and Exclusion, 2004–Present: During 2004–201: During this phase, the annual mean of legal and undocumented immigrants was 56,737, a 127 percent increase from 25,039 in phase 4. This increase included men and women and unaccompanied minors due to rising economic insecurity in Guatemala.

As anti-immigrant sentiment and increased border enforcement have taken over the region's sociopolitical climate, the circular migration patterns that had defined Central American and Mexican migration for centuries have become a thing of the past.

Today, Central American migrants are being deported at higher rates than any other region in the world (Roberts, Menjivar, and Rodriguez, 2017). The returnee women included in my study migrated to the United States in nearly all phases outlined above. While older participants migrated in phase one and younger participants in phase 4, the context of their return varied, with some returning voluntarily and others through deportation processes. However, despite growing numbers of deportees as well as voluntary returnees in Guatemala, the Guatemalan government provides little assistance for returnees during their reintegration processes (Gramajo Bauer, 2019a). In most cases, returnees are left to rely on their social networks and personal economic resources upon arrival to Guatemala. Because the majority of returnees are men, women are especially at a disadvantage when seeking assistance during their return and reintegration due to the fact that little is known about their needs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS ADDRESSED

The main research question of my thesis explores how different generations of returnee women experience their reintegration process in Guatemala. More specifically, I highlight the social challenges related to the return and reintegration that women face. In the broader context of return migration research, my thesis contributes to the growing understanding of return and the social reintegration of returnees in Central American and around the world. However, because a large gap in research exists specific to returnee women's experiences, the main purpose of my thesis is to contribute to filling this gap in understanding.

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE

My objective is to provide an analysis of the social difficulties that returnee women experience through their return and reintegration processes without sanitizing or changing their stories. Specifically, my goal is to provide details of women's internal emotional processes associated with the challenges they tackled. The information I include contributes to filling gaps in the analysis of gender and women's return migration that is largely missing in scholarship. I hope this thesis can be helpful for others conducting similar research so that gaps in social services and assistance for returnee women can be filled. Additionally, the results in this study demonstrate the need to not only focus on the return processes and economic difficulties of returnees but also the social and emotional reintegration processes that they face. The information outlined in my thesis could inform the types of services offered to returnees, including social work and mental health services.

THESIS OUTLINE

Chapter two explores the current literature related to return migration. To provide context, I first provide a historical and sociopolitical context of Guatemalan society as well as the phases of migration beginning in the 1970s. I then include statistics and definitions of return migration, including the differences between voluntary and forced return. The rest of the literature review explores the motives for return, gender roles and their influence on return migration experiences, adaptation and reintegration of returnee migrants, the role of transnationalism in return and reintegration, as well as the impact of return migration on health & well-being of returnees and the impacts of parental

deportation on American Citizen children. In chapter three, I provide details about the qualitative methodological approach I used throughout my research process. I outline my research design, data collection and codebook development and data analysis techniques.

Chapters four, five, and six provide women's narratives as they relate to their identities and roles as daughters, mothers, and retirees. Specifically, chapter four Focuses the narrative of Rosita, a young woman in her early thirties in my daughters' category. Chapter five focuses on the narrative of a Beatriz, a woman in her late forties who migrated to the U.S. in 1990. Chapter six focuses on the narrative of Camila, a woman in her mid-sixties who migrated to the U.S. in the 1970s, where she spent most of her adult life living and working. Chapter seven synthesizes the results of my data to explore my participants' common challenges, including family separation, especially as compounded by travel restrictions, judgments, and social clashes, and feeling like strangers with their own families. Finally, chapter eight engages my research results in a discussion with current literature and provides a deeper analysis of returnee women's experiences.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

While there exists substantial literature on the impacts of detention and deportation for families in the United States, the process reintegration to countries of origin for forced and voluntary returnees are still being studied. In this chapter, I include literature on statistics and definitions of return migration, motives for return, returnee gender roles, adaptation and reintegration, transnationalism, and impacts of return migration. It is important to note that as a growing field, return migration research currently lacks emphasis specific to the experience of women. Because the majority of the existing literature focuses on the experiences of men or briefly compares women's experiences to men's, there is a large gap to fill specific to women.

RETURN MIGRATION

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2006) defines return migration, either voluntary or forced, as the movement of people that return to their country of origin after having spent at least a year in another country. Voluntary return is considered to be independent or assisted return to the country of origin, a country of transit, or to a third country, based on the free will of the person who returns. Conversely, forced return is defined as the required return of a person to their country of origin, a country of transit, or a third country, based on an administrative or judicial decision.

While it is difficult, if not impossible, to document the numbers of those considered to be voluntary returnees to Guatemala, according to the Instituto Guatemalteco de Migración (IGM), 54,599 people were deported from the United States

via airway in 2019, an increase from 51,376 in 2018 and 32,833 in 2017. Unfortunately, there does not appear to exist reliable data on the number of women deported to Guatemala during the same period, but it is generally understood that the majority of deportees from the United States to Central America are men. As Pombo, Buenrostro, and Perez (2017) point out, it is important to focus on the changing role of women in migratory processes, especially as it relates to family separation. However, some studies have cited difficulties recruiting deportee women to participate, indicating a major gap in return migration research (Gutierrez, 2017).

It is important to note that every migratory wave will have a returning wave, as the majority of migrants will attempt to return, especially when migration distance is short (Roberts, Menjivar and Rodriguez, 2017). Return is affected by economic, political, and social conditions in sending and receiving countries. Additionally, migrants are more likely to return when their social webs are stronger in their country of origin or when they did not experience social mobility or economic advancement (King, 2000 as cited in Gramajo Bauer, 2019). However, according to Durand (2004), few migrants ever break with their ties to their country of origin.

MOTIVES

Forced vs. Voluntary Return

Jorge Durand (2004) theorizes the types of return migrants, separating them into four categories: 1) voluntary and definite, when economic migrants return after a prolonged absence with the intention of re-establishing themselves in their country of

origin permanently, 2) temporary workers, when migrants return due to the demands or requirements of their temporary work permits, 3) forced conditions, due to deportations due to the absence or loss of migration permits, 4) voluntary failed return, when negative experiences like unemployment, racism, discrimination, or inability to adapt motivate return. Durand acknowledges that voluntary return involves similar thought and decision making processes as required by the initial migratory journey, influenced by events that occur in migrants' lives as well as by the international contexts of countries of origin and destination.

Cerase (1974) uses similar categories to describe migrants' motives for return, including return of failure, migrants who spent just one or two years in the U.S. but whose experience was primarily defined by loss of opportunity; return of conservatism, migrants who never felt a sense of belonging in the U.S. and who had always had it in their mind to return after saving enough money to invest in their country of origin; and return of innovation, migrants whose main goal and purpose is to create social change in their country of origin. However, he also adds that some migrants can be considered return of retirement, or those who see their return as the beginning of the last stage of their life. After having lived a full life in the U.S., they make the decision to return to their country of origin due to health difficulties or because their social security pensions would not allow them to live a comfortable life in the U.S. According to Cerase, upon returning, most retired returnees convey a sense of serenity, satisfied with living a peaceful life and generally have little consequence in society.

Additionally, Wheatley (2017) organizes profiles of returnees including 1) those driven by the market economy, being economically ready or not to return, 2) those driven by the gift economy, influenced by family and community reunification and obligations, 3) those driven by the state, returning through the process of deportation. While Durand, Cerase, and Wheatly categorize returnees into similar categories, Wheatley points out that the simplification between voluntary and forced return ignores the fact that even voluntary returnees are constrained by economic, political, and social factors which influence their decision-making process and experience. For example, family or community obligations may require "voluntary" returnees to return to their country of origin regardless of their desire or economic readiness to return. Conversely, forced or involuntary returnees may have varying degrees of agency depending on their social or economic circumstances at the time of deportation which may shape the experience and meaning of such an event. Therefore, Wheatley posits that return migration is never completely voluntary or forced, but a mixture of both.

Gender & Return Migration

Return migration specific to women or that specifically addresses gender is currently under-researched. The few studies that do touch on the experiences of women only do so as a mention or in comparison to the experiences of men. In this section, I attempt to include a couple of studies that touch on gender dynamics and women's experiences. In their study on Greek returnees from Germany, Sakka, Dikaiou and Kiosseoglou (1999) explore how returnees gender role attitudes and task sharing between

heterosexual couples are influenced by their migratory and return experiences as well as cultural adaptations. The authors found that time lived abroad had the biggest influence on changing gender role attitudes allowing for or encouraging the extended role of the husband concerning traditional gender roles. The migratory and return experience also had a great effect on sharing tasks toward less traditional patters on behaviors such as shopping for things for children, but also to some more traditional patterns related to limiting women's involvement in family decision making. Task sharing and gender role attitudes were influenced by individual and family characteristics as well as living conditions at the time of return. Most importantly, however, is the fact that changing gender roles and shared tasks were adopted by returnees based on what was useful to them at the moment of readjusting to their countries of origin.

Another study of "highly skilled" voluntary Ghanian returnees conducted by Wong (2014) explores the renegotiations of gender identities, roles and norms and the intersections of class differences of Ghanaian returnees, highlighting how gender, both femininities and masculinities, shape men and women's return decision making processes and experiences. For men, who face poor job-markets while abroad and often focus on upward economic mobility, the return process reinforces traditional gender norms that restore their masculinity, especially when their migration had negative consequences of their ambitions which challenged their gender identity. Because Ghana remains a patriarchal society, men often have economic control and authority over the households, allowing them to exercise social control over the family returning as a unit. When their

families do not follow them however, returning may still give them a sense of empowerment by fulfilling their ambitions, which helps compensate for the emotional and social isolation of living away from their families. For women, return decisions and processes often also reinforce their gender identity by affirming the importance of kinship and social relations that help them meet gendered expectations and responsibilities. Because their lineage takes precedence over their role as wives, good mothering often means sacrificing their marriages for the interest of their children or matrilineage. In an effort to raise and socialize their children in familiar cultural contexts and among extended family, Ghanaian women may be motivated to return to their country of origin where they have the moral, social, and financial support of their kinship network. Additionally, women who chose to follow their aspirations instead of marrying and having children often disrupt gender norms and expectations upon their return, seeking employment opportunities.

ADAPTATION AND REINTEGRATION

Gramajo Bauer (2019b) argues that when discussing return migration, processes of reintegration should be addressed. Therefore, she outlines the different challenges faced by young deportees, or DREAMers, unaccompanied minors and family units, adult deportees from the Mexico U.S. border, and adult deportees from the U.S. interior. For young deportees, she explains, their main challenges include reintegration to family and community in Guatemala frequently unknown to them; psychosocial adaptation to an unknown or unfamiliar reality; lack of educational and job opportunities, and the desire to

re-emigrate. For unaccompanied minors and family units, Gramajo states that their greatest challenges include reintegration to family and community in Guatemala; reintegration to the educational system especially if there is shame associated with returning of if they feel the need to find a job; desire to re-emigrate to reunite with family living in the U.S. For adults deported from the Mexico U.S. border, their challenges include reintegration to family and community especially due to feelings of failure associated extenuating debt; psychosocial barriers associated with feelings of shame and embarrassment; lack of employment opportunities to pay off debt; desire to re-emigrate. Lastly, the challenges for adults deported from the U.S. interior include family separation left in the U.S. which may create a desire to re-emigrate; psychosocial adaptation to the reality of conditions they had not faced in some time; demonstrating their employment experience and capabilities acquired in the U.S.; demonstrated they are trustworthy despite not having trustworthy records; lack of employment opportunities in communities of origin or their surroundings (152-153).

Additionally, Gramajo Bauer (2019b) includes specific challenges faced by voluntary returnees who met and did not meet their goals. The greatest challenges for voluntary returnees who met their goals include reintegration to family and community after several years of living in outside of Guatemala; psychosocial adaptation to the reality of conditions they had not faced in some time**;** demonstrating their employment experience and capabilities acquired in the U.S; demonstrating they are trustworthy despite not having trustworthy records; financial and business capacities to navigate

savings and investment opportunities in their own business. On the other hand, the greatest challenges for those who failed to meet their goals include reintegration to family and community especially due to feelings of failure; psychosocial barriers associated with feelings of shame and embarrassment especially as it relates to extenuating debt; demonstrating their employment experience and capabilities acquired in the U.S; lack of employment opportunities; processes of rehabilitation in cases where addiction was present (154).

In response to the difficulties expressed by her participants, Gramajo Bauer (2019a) argues that it is necessary to shift focus from reception to integration processes of voluntary and forced returnees alike. She recommends that receiving and reintegration processes for returnees be placed under the responsibility of governmental entities, as these processes have been greatly abandoned by governmental organizations. She adds that the current existing services provided to returnees by governmental and non-governmental organizations must be decentralized from Guatemala City to the Guatemalan highlands, where the majority of returnees currently reside.

TRANSNATIONALISM

According to Cassarino (2004), returnees use their agency to move between two different geographical points by activating social webs that extend beyond borders and continue after returning. In other words, returning does not mean the end of the migration

cycle, but just another part of the circular social and economic relationships and exchanges throughout the reintegration process. Returnees prepare for their reintegration through regular visits when possible, and retain links to their home countries through remittances and other forms of support. Additionally, returnees develop transnational identities through a combination of experiences from their country of origin and their host countries. While returnees do experience difficulties with reintegration, they are, however, able to navigate spaces and negotiate their place in society by engaging all of their identities through processes of adaptation when they return to their countries of origin.

However while some returnees may enjoy the social and economic relationships and exchanges to help them in their reintegration process, as Roberts et al. (2017) point out, many others who spent the majority of their lives or grew up in the United States do not have social or emotional connections, or even call their country of origin "home" any longer. Because the strength of social and economic relationships and exchanges is dependent on each individual's age, and time spent in the U.S. among other factors, young returnees do not have the same social networks in their countries of origin as returnees who migrated during adulthood. As Gutierrez (2017) explains, because young deportees' do not have connections in their countries of origin, transnationalism for them is associated with maintaining direct connections with their former lives and relationships in the U.S. which are influential in their reintegration process. He adds that young

deportees often rely on relationships they make with other young deportees they meet in detention as sources of support once they return to Guatemala.

Despite transnational support systems in the U.S. and countries of origin, some returnees struggle deeply with reintegrating into society due to family separation. As París Pombo, et al. (2017) explain, while all deportees experience family separation as shattering, it is especially hard on mothers who express profound suffering about being separated from their children. Motherhood is often at the core of women's identity and a sense of belonging and physical closeness to their children defines their meaning-making as mothers. In the context of women deported to the U.S. Mexico border, it is therefore often difficult for mothers to rebuild their lives at a distance from their children, which may lead them to remain at the border for prolonged periods waiting for a family member to bring their children to them. However, family reunification becomes more complex when children are taken into custody by Child Protection Services in the U.S. Thus, many returnee women are likely to develop a strong desire to re-emigrate to reunite with their American Citizen children (Gramajo Bauer, 2019b).

IMPACT

Health and Well-being

In general, there is a great lack of research focusing on how social reintegration difficulties impact returnees' mental and emotional well-being. In a pilot study aimed at developing initial characterization of health impacts of returnees in Honduras, Morris and Palazuelos (2017) outline three categories of deportation-related health categories: social

and family stressors, economic deprivation, and exposure to violence. Using the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of health as "the state of complete physical, mental and social well-being", the authors argue that achieving health requires not only physical and mental health, a subjective sense of well-being that requires positive social, economic and political conditions. Therefore, they aim to conceptually integrate social, economic, and political circumstances of returnees in analyzing the impacts of deportation on their health and well-being. The authors explain that reintegration for returnees often involves multiple difficulties, including stress and social isolation, as well as economic challenges and structural violence. Renegotiating family relationships can be especially challenging, and some may experience difficulty re-establishing their parental roles with their children. Additionally, due to stereotypes family and community members may have about them, returnees are often faced with renegotiating their roles within their communities of origin. Additionally, socio-economic challenges such as lack of employment opportunities and access to education which often transform into the structural violence of living in poverty contribute to negative health outcomes.

Children

Zayas (2015) outlines how parental deportation has the potential to negatively impact their children's well-being and outcomes. He explores the impact on children he calls "deportation orphans," those who stay in the U.S. and may enter the foster care system, as well as those he calls "exiles," those who are forced to migrate to their parents' countries of origin due to parental deportation. Exiled children must, therefore,

forfeit their right to residency in the U.S. as American Citizens to stay with their parents. Zaya argues that because exiled American children are forced to migrate to countries with a lower standard of living, they are likely to suffer the consequences, including the effects of poverty, decreased educational opportunities, and violence. In addition to lacking comparable quality educational opportunities to the U.S., exiled children are unlikely to learn English successfully, likely making them ill-prepared for the transition to living in the U.S. later in life. Thus, while exiled children cannot be considered deportees or voluntary returnees at the time of their parents' deportation, they are likely to become returnees to the U.S. once they grow up and face similar challenges to their deported parents.

While research on return migration is still a growing field, literature has historically focused on return processes but has generally lacked depth on the reintegration processes of returnees. Over time, scholars have created categories to describe the various reasons for return although in many cases the categories have appeared to be too stagnant to fully understand the complexity of migrants' reasons for return. More recently, however, scholars like Wheatley have focused on broadening existing returnee categories and more deeply analyzing the agency of voluntary and forced returnees throughout return and reintegration. Research on transnationalism has also contributed to the understanding of how returnees use their social networks in the U.S. and their country of origin when preparing for return and through their reintegration process. Additionally, research on reintegration processes has begun to deepen through

the work of scholars like Gramajo Bauer, Morris et. al, and Zayas, providing a look at the impacts of deportation and return on migrants and their children.

However, because the majority of migrants and returnees have historically been men, current literature lacks specificity and comparison regarding the different categories of returnee women. In comparison to the reviewed literature in this chapter, my research explored how women's identities as daughters, mothers, and retirees influenced their experiences and how they made meaning of their return. Additionally, I synthesize the social challenges that of all my participants grappled with reintegrating into society and mending their relationships with their families. Additionally, while scholars like Zayas (2015) have demonstrated the implications that immigration enforcement in the U.S. has had on the well-being and mental health of immigrant families, I demonstrate how those implications also extend beyond borders to the return and reintegration experiences of my participants. Finally, I provide insight on how professions like social work can do to advocate for and mediate the needs of returnee women and their families.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In conducting this research study, my goal was to bring light to the stories of returnee women in Guatemala. As a former undocumented immigrant woman of over 20 years, and as a professional who has spent the majority of my adult life working with other undocumented immigrants, including women in detention centers, I often wondered about their fate after my work with them ended. What happened to women who were never lucky enough to get their asylum petitions granted? What happened with women who were detained, deported, and separated from their children? What is it like to readjust to a society you left or fled from due to violence or economic reasons? Their stories do not end simply because they go out of view from our perception. Life after returning continues and women find resilient ways of surviving and thriving despite much pain and struggle. My goal in reporting what I learned is to honor the women who shared their stories with me.

My research was done primarily in the highlands of Guatemala, including the cities of Xela (Quetzaltenango), Cajolá, and San Cristóbal Totonicapán, as well as in the City of Guatemala during the summer of 2019. I conducted ten (10) semi-structured interviews, eight of which are included in this sample, with women who identified as returnees, either voluntarily or forced, in the language preference of each participant. My sample included women whose ages ranged from mid-twenties to late seventies, and their ethnicities included *ladinas* and Indigenous Maya K'iche and Maya Mam women. My qualitative research design centered the experiences of deported and returnee women to Guatemala to better understand the circumstances and reasons for their return, the

assistance and support they received or lacked upon returning, as well as their adjustment and reintegration processes to Guatemalan society. While research on return migration has primarily focused on the experiences of men, I hope that this study will contribute to the major gap in research specific to the return and reintegration experiences of deported and voluntary returnee women.

ENTERING THE FIELD

With the help and guidance of my advisor, Dr. Nestor Rodriguez, who put me in contact with one of his longtime friends and key informants, I met a community of returnees in the Guatemalan highlands during the summer of 2019, spent approximately eight weeks in Xela. While I spent the majority of my time in Xela, I also traveled to surrounding areas, including Cajolá and San Cristobal Totonicapan using public transportation or with friends in their car.

PARTICIPANT SAMPLING

During my time in Xela, I had the opportunity to spend time with my now dear friend Willy, who self-identifies as K'iche and a voluntary returnee, as well as his wife Ixkik, who not only supported me to find and meet returnee women but also took me into their spiritual community. As a returnee himself, Willy had developed connections with other returnees in Guatemala through his work as Co-Fonder of *Desarrollo Sostenible Para Guatemala* (DESGUA), a grass-roots organization focusing and network of community groups focused on creating educational and economic opportunities for returnees to provide alternatives to emigration. With his knowledge and connections with

other returnees, Willy became my key informant. Key informants are individuals "whose social positions in a research setting give them specialist knowledge about other people, processes or happenings that is more extensive, detailed or privileged than ordinary people, and who are therefore particularly valuable sources of information to a researcher" (Payne & Payne, 2004).

With Willy's help, I began recruiting my participants through a snowball sampling method, which as developed by Goodman (1961), involves asking participants in each stage of the research process to name other individuals from the intended research population. Willy helped connect me with one of my participants as well as other returnee men who also introduced me to other participants. Through the continued process of snowball sampling, participants introduced me to other participants. In some cases, I recruited participants through three different stages of snowball sampling. For example, in one case, Willy introduced me to another returnee man that led me to a participant who then referred me to another woman. Additionally, as I made new friends in Xela, and chatted with them about the purposes of my visit and details on my research study, and they also helped connect me with the participants included in this report. I primarily made contact with my participants through messaging on WhatsApp or over the phone. It is important to note that some of the common limitations of snowball sampling include a nonrandom selection of participants, correlations between network size and probably sample size, reliance on informant's judgments, and concerns surrounding confidentiality. However, snowball sampling also has cost and efficiency benefits (Johnson, 2014) as well as helping recruit hard-to-reach or hidden populations, especially

when the population is small, geographically dispersed, when members experience stigma or are immersed within networks that are hard for outsiders to penetrate. (Heckathorn, 2011)

While I interviewed a total of ten women, only eight of those women, all of various ages and backgrounds, are included in this sample. I chose to only include the eight women listed below because a) one of the women was a Mexican Citizen who lived in the U.S. for some time but migrated to Guatemala with her Guatemalan husband, and b) the other woman had migrated the U.S, was deported shortly before our interview and was planning on trying to migrate again shortly after our interview. It is important to note that not all returns undergo a process of reintegration. Therefore, I chose not to include the two women listed above because although valuable, their stories did not fit with the focus of my research regarding women's reintegration to their country of origin.

Because I began to see generational differences between my participants, I decided to create the categories of "daughters," "mothers," and "retirees," which helped me make meaning of my data. I define "daughters" as women whose decision to return and reintegration experiences were largely influence by their roles or identities as daughters. Similarly, I define "mothers" as women whose return and reintegration experiences were influenced and impacted by their relationships with their children either still living in the U.S. or living with them in Guatemala. Finally, I define "retirees" as women who returned to Guatemala after retiring from their jobs or professions in the U.S.

Table 1 shows my participants' demographics, ages of migration, time spent living in the U.S., age of return, time since returning to Guatemala, and type of return, whether it was through a process of deportation or voluntary.

Table 1: Participants

Daughters								
Participant Pseudonyms	Age at interview	Residence at interview	Age at migration	Time in U.S.	Time since return	Age of return	Race Ethnicity	Type of return
Isabel	27	San Cristobal	11	7 yrs on & off	10 yrs	18	Maya K'iche	Deportation
Lee	27	Guatemala City	7	11	9 yrs	18	Ladina	Deportation
Rosita	32	Xela	11	7 yrs	14 yrs	18	Ladina	Voluntary return
Nataly	35	Cajolá	18	6 yrs	11 yrs	24	Maya Mam	Voluntary return

Table 1: continued

Mothers								
Participant Pseudonyms	Age at interview	Current Residence	Age at migration	Time in U.S.	Time since return	Age of return	Race Ethnicity	Type of return
Maria	40	Xela	19	10 yrs	11 yrs	29	Ladina	Voluntary return
Beatriz	47	Xela	19	20	9 yrs	38	Maya K'iche	Deportation
Retirees								
Participant Pseudonyms	Age at interview	Current Residence	Age at migration	Time in U.S.	Time since return	Age of return	Race Ethnicity	Type of return
Camila	65	Cajolá	20	41	4 yrs	61	Ladina	Self-return
Laurel	77	San Cristobal	39	23 yrs	15 yrs	62	Maya K'iche	Self-return

DATA COLLECTION

Before to my trip to Guatemala, I gained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Texas at Austin to conduct this research study. A waiver for written informed consent was approved by the IRB board to avoid maintaining physical records to the vulnerable population included in this study. However, participants were informed verbally about the aims of this research project, that their participation was voluntary, and they could stop participating at any time. Additionally,

they were informed that the risk of participating in the study was no greater than everyday life but that it could entail recalling unpleasant emotions or memories. Participants were also assured that none of their identifiable information would be disclosed under any circumstances. Lastly, participants were asked to respond with a verbal yes to express their desire and willingness to participate.

As part of my graduate studies, I took a qualitative research methods class at the Steve Hicks School of Social Work with Dr. Marilyn Armour from the School of Social Work at UT Austin, where I learned about the different types qualitative research, how to create interview guides, data collection, and analysis. Based on my learning from Dr. Armour's class, and using Brinkmann and Kvale (2014)'s guiding principles on thematizing and designing interview studies, I developed an interview guide focused on the experiences of return and reintegration of Guatemalan women to help generate the conversation with my participants about reasons for initial migration, circumstances of or reasons for returning, adjustment and reintegration, assistance and support, possibilities and reasons for future re-migration. I chose the topics mentioned above following my interests, intuition about the meaning of returning, and past experiences working with women in detention where I heard many of their fears and concerns surrounding possible deportation.

I conducted semi-structured life-world interviews with each of my participants, which are defined as "an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena" (Brinkmann, 2014b, 6). While structured interviews are frequently used to conduct

surveys and help compare data across participants to be quantified, completely unstructured interviews are meant to highlight the most important parts of participants' life experiences without interruptions or direction from the interviewer. Therefore, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews because they provided a nice balance between structured and unstructured research methods, making better use of interpersonal dialogues in the process of knowledge production between interviewer and interviewees. Additionally, as an active participant in the research process, semi-structured interviews do not allow the interviewer to hide behind an interview guide but do facilitate the interviewer's focus on the research project (Brinkmann, 2014a).

While conducting the interviews, I used the interview guide to generate conversation but did not strictly follow the interview guide. Instead, critically followed my participants' answers with follow-up questions related to the details of each of their stories. Although I generally asked most of the questions in the interview guide, I did not ask the same questions to every woman, and at times I asked questions that were not listed in the guide. Some of the questions included in my interview guide are as follows:

- Why had you decided to migrate to the U.S.?
- Tell me about your migration experience.
- What was life like in the U.S?
- How did your experiences inside detention affect your emotions, thoughts, behaviors?
- How did these experiences affect you after returning to Guatemala?
- What has life been like since you returned to Guatemala?

- What difficulties have you had since returning?
- What positive experiences have you had since returning?
- How has this experience affected your relationships?
- What help have you received since you returned? From who?
- What help did you need since you returned that you did not get?
- How have your needs changed from when you first arrived to now?
- Do you regret having migrated? Why or why not?
- Do you regret returning? Why or why not?
- What is your support system now? How has it changed since you returned?
- Do you plan on migrating again? Why or why not?

Ranging from one hour to approximately one hour and a half, I recorded each of the interviews with a small voice recorder with my participants' permission. All but one of the interviews were done in Spanish, as per the participants' language preference. I met all of my participants at a location of their choice to ease their comfort in talking to me about their personal experiences. While most of them invited me into their homes, I did meet my first participant at a coffee shop where we were able to find a small room to sit together privately. Due to financial constraints, I was unable to offer my participants any monetary compensation. As is customary when visiting people in Latin America, however, I did ensure to bring bread or lunch when visiting their homes or bought them a cup of coffee, which we enjoyed together during our interviews.

DATA ANALYSIS

After returning from Guatemala, I took an advanced qualitative research methods class at the Steve Hicks School of Social Work during the Spring 2020 semester with Dr. Lauren Gulbas, who became the second reader for this thesis. Throughout the semester, I transcribed all of the interviews in their entirety using the application AnyTune on my phone to slow down the speed of the recordings and google docs voice typing to write each transcript. I then reviewed each transcript once to familiarize myself with each participant's story before creating a codebook.

Additionally, during my time in Dr. Gulbas' class, I gained a better understanding of the different data analysis methods and decided to conduct a narrative analysis of my data. Therefore, I used Narrative Coding and analysis, which blends concepts from the humanities, literary criticism, and social sciences to examine people's lives holistically. Because interpretation of narratives can be approached from literary, sociological/sociolinguistic, psychological, and anthropological perspectives, it is particularly useful for research related to identity development, psychological, social and cultural meanings, feminist studies, and the life course (Saldana, 2015).

My codebook development process involved using excel to track changes after every transcript using tabs on the excel document. Each tab represented a new transcript, where I included new codes or changes in code definitions. Although I have not yet reached code saturation, my final codebook includes 23 unique codes, which I then used to begin coding my data set. After finalizing my codebook, I color-coded each woman's transcript to more easily identify where each code originated from. I then began sorting

all relevant data onto a new excel document according to each code's definition, using a separate tab for each code. Once all data was coded appropriately, I used the complied codes to further analyze my data, giving me a deeper understanding of my participants' experiences. All codes and themes are derived directly from my data.

Throughout my research project, I conducted audit trails of the progress of my data analysis. According to Merriam (2002), audit trails increase the reliability of a research study by authenticating its findings through detailed descriptions about data collection, code development, and inquiry decisions. Using audit trails involves keeping dated research journals and memos throughout the study that include researcher reflections, questions, decisions, and ideas. My audit trails included brief field memos after conducting each interview to process main immediate insights, as well as my own emotions and reactions; weekly memos outlining my thoughts after reading through transcripts and progress during codebook development and coding procedures.

The results of my data analysis on common difficulties were returned to participants via email to gather feedback and ensure validity. According to Birt, Cavers, Campbell, and Scott (Birt et al., 2016), member checking of analyzed data is considered appropriate when its purpose is to explore how the results resonated with participants' experiences. I contacted my participants through WhatsApp in August 2020, asking them if they would be interested and willing to read the results of the data I gathered during my interviews with them. I expressed that the purpose of this exercise was to gain a better understanding of whether my results resonated with their experience. I then sent willing participants an email with the de-identified results chapter and asked them to provide

feedback on whether the results resonated with them, if they would change anything, and if they would like to add anything. Table 2 shows the characteristics of participants who were sent results data, participated in member checking and provided additional comments. Finally, while it was my intention to use the feedback gathered through these member checking procedures, the women who participated in member checking expressed that what was included in the chapter I sent them reflected their experience and did not have any changes to make.

Table 2: Member Checking

	Asked to participate in member checking	Agreed to be sent results chapter	Returned	Did not return
Daughters	3	2	0	2
Mothers	2	2	1	1
Retirees	1	1	1	0

My thesis focuses on generational narrative analysis, describing how daughters, mothers, and retirees recall and retell their stories. Direct quotes from participants' interviews are used throughout to avoid sanitizing or changing their stories.

POSITIONALITY

I was very honored and humbled by how forthcoming my participants were with sharing their stories. I was able to establish rapport with my participants quickly, and this was mainly because I was introduced to each of them by someone they knew well and deeply trusted. Additionally, I believe I was able to gain my participants' trust very quickly because of my own identity as an undocumented immigrant woman in the United States for over 20 years, information that I always disclosed upon meeting them. I also explained that I was working to finish my master's degree in Social Work and Latin American Studies with the hope was that my thesis project would have some positive impact on the experiences of future women returnees and immigrants in the United States.

LIMITATIONS

While I believe the strengths of this project can contribute to the understudied topic of return migration, especially for women, there are also limitations to consider. It is important to note that while this thesis serves to shed light on the experiences of my participants, it cannot be overly generalized. Because the majority of my participants lived in the Guatemalan highlands at the time of my interviews, geographic limitations may be relevant in this study. It may be important to study the experiences of women living near the Guatemalan Mexican border, in more touristic areas like Antigua, or more extensively in Guatemala City. Conversely, the women in this study lived in varied geographic locations in the United States, like California, New York, Chicago, North Carolina, and Houston, and this may be another limiting factor in the generalizability of

their experiences. Additionally, because this study includes eight women, a larger sample size would provide deeper saturation to understand returnee experiences.

FINDINGS

Next, I will present my findings according to the categories of "daughters", "mothers", and "retirees" in the three narrative chapters that follow. Chapter four focuses on the narrative of Rosita, a 32-year-old woman in the "daughters" category; chapter five focuses on the narrative of Beatriz, a 49-year-old woman in the "mothers" category; chapter six focuses on the narrative of Camila, a 65-year-old woman in the "retirees" category. Following the narratives, I include chapter eight as synthesis on the social challenges of return and reintegration for women and finish with chapter nine as a discussion and conclusion to my findings.

Chapter 4: Rosita

This chapter focuses on the experience of a 32-year-old woman named Rosita, who initially migrated to the U.S as an unaccompanied minor when she was 11 years old and returned voluntarily to Guatemala just before her 18th birthday. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the social challenges that younger returnee women face upon returning and reintegrating into Guatemalan society. The women in my "daughters" category, expressed that their main struggle was in adjusting to living in the towns where they grew up after becoming accustomed to American culture and belief systems due to spending their formative years in the U.S. Observing the differences between how women are perceived and treated in the U.S. and Guatemala, their experience was shaped by constantly having to prove wrong the stereotypes that others had of them as a young woman who lived in the U.S. for some time. I use Rosita's story to demonstrate how their identities as daughters shaped young women's return and reintegration experiences.

Return Process

Rosita's decision to migrate to the U.S. and return to Guatemala were both largely influenced by her identity as a daughter and her desire to reunite with her family and help ensure everyone's well-being. As the eldest daughter living in the United States when her mother had two other young children, Rosita took the responsibility of returning to Guatemala to help her older sister who was experiencing a crisis after surviving a crime in her own home. While Rosita had made the long journey to reunite with her mom at the age of 11, she sacrificed educational and employment opportunities to help meet

everyone's needs. Upon returning to Guatemala, however, she was shocked to see the lack of progress in the small town where she grew up, which was the first of many frustrations throughout her reintegration process.

Rosita recounts her initial decision to migrate to the U.S. at just 11 years old due to a strong desire to reunite with her mother who had left her in Guatemala in the care of her grandmother.

> *"Decidí migrar cuando tenía 11 años. Fue una decisión que tome como en dos días. Prácticamente de un día para otro. Por lo regular soy así, tomar decisiones rápidas. Entonces estábamos en una situación donde mi mama vive allá indocumentada, y mi abuelita ya grande de edad se encargo de mi hermana y de mi. La mayoría de mis amiguitos o mis compañeros de juego, sus papás se los llevaban, porque en ese entonces era tan fácil irse y cualquiera se iba. Entonces ellos decidían irse, y yo de ver que todos se iban con su familia, entonces yo decidí, no, yo me voy, me voy, me voy, y me voy. Entonces dije, si ellos pueden llegar allá, entonces yo también puedo llegar allá buscando a mi mamá. Entonces ella no estaba muy de acuerdo porque ella tenía que soltar la planta verdad, para que yo me fuera. No estaba muy de acuerdo, pero al final me recuerdo que yo le dije que aunque ella me diera el dinero o no me diera el dinero yo me iba ir. Con coyote o sin coyote yo me iba ir. Entonces decidió mejor dar el dinero para que yo me pudiera ir."*

Rosita was determined to be reunited with her mother, so much so that she had planned to migrate north regardless of whether her mother approved or not or whether

she had the help of a coyote to help her navigate her journey through Mexico. She often saw her friends, often boys, who set north to reunite with their family members and did not think twice about her ability to make it north also. Seeing her determination, Rosita's mother recognized the dangers that her daughter would face alone through Mexico, and thus decided to provide the money necessary to hire a coyote to guide Rosita in her journey. Rosita shared many details of her migration journey with me, including the intricate networks of migrants and Mexican civilians that helped her and other migrants as they made their way north. She recalls being the only girl in a group of men and how two migrant men protected her even after they lost connection with their coyote. Specifically, Rosita shared that despite hearing many stories of the violence women experience when they migrate alone, like being raped and assaulted along the way, she was lucky enough to not have any similar experiences. The most difficult part for her was being hungry and thirsty, which was often resolved with the help of friendly Mexican civilians who offered juice to drink or a bite to eat. The details of her migration journey would become much more significant later in her story when she returned to Guatemala and experienced violence she had never encountered before.

Seven years after Rosita's arrival to the U.S., Rosita recalls the context behind her eventual decision to return to Guatemala.

> *"Mi hermana se quedó con mi tía acá en Guatemala [después de que mi abuela se fue a los Estados Unidos también]. No la podíamos mandar a traer porque ninguno teníamos el estatus migratorio para tramitar una visa. Ella no se iba poder ir de la manera en que yo me fui (sin papeles) porque [estaba*

diagnosticada con esquizofrenia]. Entonces mi hermana como iba creciendo se iba haciendo mas rebelde, mas rebelde, mas rebelde, hasta que en uno de los últimos viajes que mi abuelita hizo, ya no la pudo dejar con nadie más porque nadie la quería cuidar. O sea, nadie quería estar lidiando con ella porque pegaba, gritaba, tiraba cosas. Entonces se quedó sola en la casa, y en lo que ella se quedó sola en la casa, se metieron a la casa a robar. La golpearon, la abusaron, se llevaron todo."

The news that her sister had been a victim of a violent crime, especially because she had special challenges related to mental health diagnosis, put Rosita's family into a state of desperation to try to figure out what to do to help her.

"Entonces mi mamá en la desesperación, eso fue en el año 2002, en la desesperación, ella quería regresarse. Pero, yo tuve, tengo un hermano que nació exactamente en octubre del año 2002. O sea, ella quería venirse y dejarnos con el nene allá de 3, 2 meses de nacido. Y entonces no la dejé. Le dije que mejor me venía yo. Que si se trataba de cuidar a mi hermana, me venía yo a cuidarla porque ¿qué haríamos nosotros sin ella? Ya no era solo una niña, ya éramos 3, ya había nacido mi hermanita, ya había nacido mi hermanito el que estaba recién nacido. Entonces mi mama tenia su pareja, el papá de lo dos nenes. Entonces ¿qué íbamos a hacer con mi padrastro ahí? Entonces decidí que mejor me venía yo porque no era justo que nos dejará con un niño, que dejara el nene. Y que tal vez era más fácil cuidarla yo. Entonces por eso regrese en diciembre del 2002.

Regrese para poder hacerme cargo de mi hermana, y desde ese año yo la tengo a mi cargo."

As the eldest daughter, Rosita realized that returning to Guatemala to take care of her sister was the best decision for the entire family. Because her younger siblings were both so little, having her mother return to Guatemala implied that she would have to become the caretaker to two very young children, something she was not prepared to do. Her younger siblings needed their mother to stay with them in the U.S. to keep the family together. About to turn 18, Rosita sacrificed the life she was beginning to build in the U.S. for the well-being of her older sister, her younger siblings, and her mother. As she later shared with me, she often wondered what her life might have been like if she had stayed in the U.S. Because Rosita had begun making choices that she believed would lead her to a successful life, like being a good student and staying out of trouble, she saw her return to Guatemala as many missed opportunities.

Despite only having been gone seven years, Rosita recalls her initial impressions after arriving in the small town in which she grew up.

"Cuando entre al pueblo, yo venía en el carro con mi tío que me había ido a traer del aeropuerto, lo primero que me dio fue miedo, ver cómo estaba el pueblo al que yo llegaba. A pesar de que no habían sido muchos muchos años los que había vivido en los Estados Unidos, ya me había acostumbrado a ver todo de una manera diferente. Las calles limpias, las calles en buen estado, centros comerciales, las casas totalmente diferentes. Cuando yo entre a mi pueblo las calles estaban todas llenas de baches, habían piedras. O sea, es que siempre

habían estado ahí, pero dejarlas de ver por mucho tiempo y regresar otra vez a verlo todo, lo mire como un lugar totalmente extraño al que estaba llegando."

Having grown accustomed to life in the U.S. made her feel afraid of the things she saw in her town. While Rosita realized that the houses, the rocks, and the holes on the dirt road had been there before her migration, she was still shocked to see them when she arrived. It was as if she was placed in a strange land she had never seen before. Rosita's experience reflects how young migrants fully integrate into U.S. society and have difficulty when they return to Guatemala. Despite only having spent part of her middle childhood and adolescence in the U.S., Rosita became accustomed to clean and well-paved roads, American style houses, as well as other American commodities that are uncommon in small towns in Guatemala.

ADAPTATIONS

After returning to Guatemala, Rosita began the process of reintegration into the small town she grew up in. She struggled with making sense of the way other young women were treated, realizing they did not have the same type of freedom that she did in the United States. Additionally, Rosita also came to understand that people perceived her as a troublemaker, sexually promiscuous, or "easy" because she was as a returnee woman, a label that would impact her very deeply at several stages of her life. Rosita's reintegration involved many judgments and social clashes that impeded her from ever feeling like she belonged in Guatemala society.

Here Rosita recalls how her expectations of progress in Guatemala were shattered once she realized that things had not only not changed, but she believed had become worse than she remembered.

> *"Yo me lo imaginaba, en tantos años, tiene que haber un progreso, tiene que ser diferente. Pero yo sentí que en lugar de encontrarlo mejor, lo encontré peor a como yo creí, como yo lo veía cuando era pequeña. Tal vez veía las cosas de forma diferente, no habían ciertas cosas a las que no les ponía tanta atención tal vez. Entonces no encontré lo que yo esperaba encontrar. Esperaba encontrar tal vez a muchas de mis compañeras diferentes y las encontré siendo ya mamás, viviendo con un hombre machista, o quedándose en casa, no poder salir ni tener una amiga, no pudiéndose vestir bien porque no estaba bien, no se ve bien que una mujer con marido se vea así. O no se ve bien que una mujer con un hijo se exprese de esa manera, o no tiene derecho. Muchas de mis amigas las encontré de esa manera. A pesar de que éramos jóvenes muchas quedaron embarazadas a los 16, 17 años. Entonces muchas las encontré así pero yo esperaba ver señoritas siendo independientes, libres, tratando de decidir la carrera que iban a estudiar, no era lo que yo esperaba."*

As a young woman who had developed many dreams while living in the U.S., Rosita was shocked to find her friends already being young mothers with men she perceived to be toxic and sexists, limiting their agency to work and study. While it bothered her to see other young women in oppressive relationships, this was a reflection of the type of life she dreamed for herself. She wanted to be an independent woman in

Guatemala, to be able to study to become a professional even though she was no longer living in the U.S., something she was continuing to strive toward the day I met her. In various parts of our interview, Rosita expressed feeling frustrated with the fact that women were not as free to develop themselves professionally or work in the same way that men were.

Rosita's observations of other young women's lives in Guatemala was the beginning of a long list of events that frustrated her about how she was treated as a woman upon returning. She recalls being judged for having tattoos, for wearing form fitting clothing, or having a cup of wine or a glass of beer.

> *"En el pueblo de donde yo soy, la gente señala mucho. Si uno lleva un tatuaje, uno es un delincuente, uno es un vándalo. En ese entonces, si yo me ponía un pantalón talladito, yo ya era una chica fácil. Entonces yo traía mi manera de vestir, que era diferente a la del pueblo, entones yo era la chica fácil. Hasta el día de hoy, yo tengo tatuajes, y si yo llego allá y uso una camiseta y si me miran, todavía hay personas que me miran así como, *gasp*, es una marera, es una delincuente. En el pueblo de donde yo soy hay todavía mucha ignorancia tal vez, es muchos se han quedado atrás. Una mujer no puede tener una copa de vino en la mano significa que es una cualquiera. Si una mujer toma una cerveza ya todo el pueblo lo sabe que tenia una cerveza en la mano, que es una mujer fácil, que después se fue con el que estaba. Entonces, no se si pasara en otros pueblos, pero en mi pueblo exactamente pasa mucho eso, mucha discriminación, mucho machismo, demasiado."*

Having tattoos, wearing form-fitting clothing, and drinking alcohol all had major implications on how others perceived Rosita as a woman. Her tattoos were associated with gangs, especially the Mara gangs who are well known in Central America to be very violent. Additionally, her choice of clothing or drinking alcohol made everyone think of her as sexually promiscuous or easy. In other parts of her story, Rosita shared that she had to constantly fight against other's perceptions of her that led to constant sexual harassment. She felt like she needed to prove that she was not sexually liberal like others thought she was simply because she lived in the U.S. for some time. Out of all the challenges she faced in Guatemala, especially in the small town she grew up in, fighting against other's preconceived notions of her womanhood was what Rosita struggled with the most.

After three years of attempting to adapt to living in the small town she grew up in, Rosita decided to move to Xela because she never managed to feel comfortable. However, she also experienced people's misconceptions about her in Xela that led to one of the most defining experiences as a returnee in Guatemala.

> *"La vida en Xela ha sido buena y ha sido mala. Cuando yo estuve acá en el año 2010, yo fui abusada sexualmente. Había salido de fiesta con mis compañeros de trabajo. Era de madrugada. Era uno de mis amigos, del círculo de mis amigos quien abusó de mi. Entonces la policía lo tomó como, usted tiene la culpa, por que estaba con ellos. Esa eventualidad fue la que me hizo arrepentirme totalmente de haberme venido [a Guatemala]. Yo digo, me hubiera quedado allá, o a veces me preguntaba que hubiera sido de mi si me hubiera quedado allá, no*

me hubiera pasado todo esto. Lo mas, lo mas difícil que yo he pasado acá, es eso de tachar a las mujeres de fáciles, de no darle a la mujer el lugar que le corresponde en muchas ocasiones, la discriminación, es lo que mas me ha tocado, lo mas difícil."

As she explains, discrimination and having to constantly battle people's stereotypes of her as a sexually promiscuous returnee woman was the greatest challenge she experienced. Being sexually assaulted made her completely question her decision to return to Guatemala. It was inevitable for her to wonder what her life might have been like if she had stayed in the U.S. Perhaps she would not have suffered through such a horrible experience if she had not volunteered to return to help her sister or had not prioritized the entire family's well-being over her own.

Rosita's pain was compounded by the failing systems that were built to help survivors of sexual assault in Guatemala. In her attempt to find help and justice for what happened to her, she was left feeling intense frustration and rage with the way her case was handled by authorities and social service agencies.

"El decir, querer hablar o querer decir lo que está pasando. Y que simplemente anotes tu nombre ahí en una lista y espera tu turno. Eso ha sido lo mas, lo mas difícil que a una le puede pasar al regresar. Simplemente me quede súper decepcionada de mis propias leyes y de mi propio país. Al darme cuenta que la persona que me había dañado y me había marcado para siempre toda mi vida tardó tres o cuatro meses en salir de prisión simplemente porque tenía influencias y tenía dinero, porque era hombre y yo había sido mujer y no tenía que estar en el

lugar que estaba y a la hora que estaba. Entonces la culpable, lo vi de esa manera, aunque no me lo hayan dicho, yo sentí que mis propias leyes, mi propio país me decía tú tienes la culpa. Darse cuenta que lamentablemente en nuestro país las leyes, el gobierno, todo es totalmente diferente tal vez las leyes y el gobierno de los Estados Unidos no nos pertenece, pero en cierto punto nos protegen y hasta nos escuchan que es un país ajeno. Pero acá no es así."

Rosita saw the injustice that occurred when her perpetrator was released from jail just three or four months after he was arrested. She could not comprehend how a system that was supposed to help her bring justice to her experience could simply let him free because he had connections and money. While he could go free to live his life, Rosita was kept with the memories of the event for the rest of her life. She felt blamed and betrayed by the systems she relied on, and she began comparing them to systems in the U.S., which she perceived to be much more helpful and supportive to undocumented immigrants than Guatemala was to its citizens.

Rosita's recounted the events following the sexual assault that resulted in an unwanted pregnancy and having to carry to full term severely impacted her mental health.

"Cuando esto sucedió, visite psicólogos porque yo quería quitarme la vida. Yo ya no quería vivir. Me quedé, así como, tanto que me cuidé, tanto que mi mamá me decía, cuidado. Tanto que me guarde para que me viniera a pasar algo así. Estuve hospitalizada mucho tiempo. Estuvieron a punto de meterme a un centro psiquiátrico porque yo tenía muchas pesadillas. Yo me sentía re-mal. Fue difícil porque debido a ese acto, yo quede embarazada, y ante tanto examen y tanto

chequeo nos dimos cuenta de que eran dos bebés. O sea, yo no quería uno, mucho menos iba querer 2. Entonces, yo no quería tener ningún bebe. Yo no quería vivir."

Having to not only process the experience of sexual assault, but also finding out she was pregnant with twins led Rosita to become hospitalized due to suicidal ideation and nightmares. She recalled having no desire to have a baby, let alone two of them, and this led to not wanting to live any longer.

Through this experience, Rosita lost faith in God, wondering why she was being punished and abandoned by God.

"Mi familia es muy cristiana, y siempre eran de que, si la hoja de un árbol se mueve es por la voluntad de dios. Entonces en ese momento, yo no quería saber nada de la voluntad de dios. Lo sentí que era mi enemigo, porque yo todo el tiempo era, gracias dios porque en ningún momento me has abandonado. Y en ese momento era, ¿en donde estabas? O sea, ¿que fue lo que paso ahí? ¿Que yo hice mal para que te dieras la espalda y no vieras lo que me iba pasar o no me libraras de lo que me iba pasar? Me dieron la opción de poder aplicar a un aborto porque no, si yo no quería tenerlos no era mi obligación hacerlo. Lo cual ante mi familia era pecado porque estaba matando seres humanos y no estaba bien ante los ojos de dios. Entonces fue muy difícil, pero me convencieron de tener el embarazo y darlos en adopción porque decía mi abuelita, hay mujeres que desean tener un hijo y no pueden. Pero cuando estaba embarazada yo decía, yo no, o sea, no, yo no voy a alimentar algo que yo no pedí. Yo no me voy a

cuidar. A mi no me importa si están bien o están mal. Tenía mucho coraje contra todo."

While her family convinced her to carry the pregnancy to full term and give the babies up for adoption due to their religious beliefs, Rosita was left with many questions about how God could have let such an awful experience happen to her. She wondered where God was, what mistake she made to be punished so harshly, and why he didn't spare her the experience that caused her so much pain. She was so enraged that she refused to take prenatal vitamins or take care of herself for the well-being of the babies.

However, Rosita had created a plan to have the babies, give them up for adoption and migrate to the U.S. once again where she did not have to face the shame and judgements of people in her community.

"Lo que yo había decidido hacer era tener a los bebés, darlos en adopción y regresarme para los Estados Unidos nuevamente donde nadie me conociera. O tal vez regresar con mi familia y mis amigos de allá que no supieran qué era lo que me había pasado aquí. Que nadie me pudiera señalar o verme tal vez con lastima o verme diferente porque me había pasado algo diferente."

Rosita wanted a fresh start in a place where no one could recognize her to pity or judge her. She wanted to be able to move forward with her life without having to be surrounded by the constant memory or chatter of what happened to her. In her mind, the U.S. was the best place to leave all of that behind and finally be free to live her life how she had always envisioned it.

However, Rosita recalls that complications with one of the babies made her have a type of revelation in which her experiences flashed before her eyes, suddenly giving new meaning to everything she had gone through as a migrant and returnee.

> *"Una de las bebés había nacido muerta, la tuvieron que revivir. La tuvieron que meter una bombilla y una manguera el la boca, presionar el pecho y todo. Entonces yo estaba viendo todo eso porque a uno le ponen anestesia local, solo es de la cadera para abajo. Entonces en ese momento como que toda mi vida me pasó por enfrente cuando yo ví esa niña. Entre mi, yo dije, ¿será que dios me libró de tanta cosa que pase de niña no me paso nada porque lo que él quería que yo pasara todo esto y llegar hasta aquí? O sea, me preguntaba tantas cosas que cuando yo vi a las dos nenas ya no las quise dar. Dije que ya no las iba dar y que me las iba quedar. Y tengo 8 años con ellas." (crying)*

Seeing her newborn daughters, especially the resuscitation of one of her babies, helped Rosita's make new meaning out of her entire journey as a migrant and returnee. Her faith in God was restored, feeling like she understood how God protected her throughout her journey and understood her struggles as stepping stones to arriving at her daughters' births. She felt the intensity of the moment at such a deep level that Rosita decided she did not want to put her daughters up for adoption any longer and decided to keep them instead.

Rosita's decision to return and challenges with reintegration began with her identity and role as a daughter but ended with her becoming a mother. While Rosita sacrificed educational opportunities to help her family in the U.S. and her sister in

Guatemala, she also struggled with feeling judged as a young woman who broke traditional gender norms. The misconceptions and stereotypes as sexually promiscuous that others had of her impacted her ability to feel like she belonged in Guatemala. Rosita described constantly feeling discriminated against and having to prove that she was not like others perceived her. However, the way she was viewed in Guatemalan society led to experiencing a sexual assault that impacted her direction in life and transformed the way she viewed herself.

FUTURE

As Rosita began to create new meaning of her experiences and step into the role of mother, her focus became creating stability for herself and her daughters by attempting to build a family with a partner and focusing her efforts on finishing her college degree. Rosita began to think about the types of opportunities and freedoms that she wanted her daughters to experience and decided that their futures should not be in Guatemala. Comparing her experiences and opportunities in the United States, where she felt like she was more respected as a human being, Rosita began to include migration into her future plans.

After having her daughters, Rosita moved from Xela back to the small town where she grew up. She recalls two significant relationships that ultimately failed for different reasons, leaving her and her daughters alone.

> *"Después de tener a mis dos hijas, me casé muy joven. Tenía tal vez como 23 años. Mi matrimonio no funcionó. El mismo año que me casé me separé porque a*

mi me gusta ser independiente, no me gusta de estar dependiendo de alguien. Me había casado con alguien de mi mismo pueblo y fui a caer con un hombre machista. No, así no funcionaba. Al tiempo conocí a alguien más, el papa de mi nena pequeña. El también es una persona que vivió un tiempo en Estados Unidos, y él no se pudo adaptar a vivir acá, a recibir el sueldo que se recibía acá, que eran 3,000 quetzales al mes, que era lo que recibía allá en una semana. Entonces no se adaptó y se regresó para Estados Unidos. Allá tiene una nueva pareja y me he quedado sola con las 3 nenas desde hace 4 años. Ha sido difícil porque ser prácticamente mamá soltera es bien difícil saber que soy responsable de cómo ellas vayan a ser cuando sean grandes. Y hay muchas cosas por las que yo pase que yo no quiero que ellas pasen, típico de toda mamá. No quiero que mis hijas pasen por lo que yo pase, o por lo menos tratar de prepararlas."

After her first marriage failed, Rosita had a relationship with another returnee and had her third daughter. However, because her partner was also a returnee who was unable to readjust to living in Guatemala and earning very low wages, he migrated to the U.S. once again and she was left alone with three daughters. Rosita understood his reasons for migrating, and she did not appear to resent him for having to leave. In fact, in later parts of the interview, she shared that her ex-partner does support her and his daughter by sending remittances when he can. However, as Rosita stated here, she feels a very big responsibility to guide her daughters as they grow older and protect them from the negative experiences she experienced as a woman in Guatemala.

For Rosita, providing better opportunities and experiences for her daughters involved advancing her career prospects and opening up possibilities for international travel. Here she explains how her studies relate to her plan to eventually migrate once again.

> *"Ahora puedes obtener un trabajo si tienes un título universitario. Puedes obtener un trabajo si tienes experiencia, si tienes contactos, si tienes influencia, si te dedicas a ser esclavo vas a obtener un buen sueldo, si no no. Entonces estoy estudiando profesorado de enseñanza media, este es mi último año. Entonces por medio de la beca, y el título de la universidad que es internacional, estoy tratando de aplicar para poder obtener una visa y poder viajar. Los planes eran viajar en el 2020 porque las niñas ya van a tener 9 años y quiero que conozcan un lugar diferente. Pero el proceso si es un poco largo, es un poco difícil, hay muchos requisitos, mucha documentación que completar, entonces se está dificultado."*

Rosita wanted to be able to provide her daughters with opportunities to see other parts of the world, so she focused her studies in a career that would allow her to eventually apply for a visa to the United States. Because she did not return to Guatemala through the deportation process and did not have any contact with immigration authorities, she may not encounter legal difficulties in applying for her visa. However, as is common with Guatemalan visas to the U.S., Rosita's plans were delayed.

Because her experience in Guatemala was defined by the corruption she saw and the lack of help she encountered when she needed the most support, she saw leaving

Guatemala as the best option for her daughters to have a better future. Here she explains how her goals include providing opportunities for her daughters outside of Guatemala.

> *"Mi propósito es poder terminar mi carrera y tramitar una visa para que mis hijas se vayan de aquí. Para que no tengan que pasar lo que a veces uno como mujer tiene que pasar acá como el machismo, la falta de valores, el gobierno que en lugar de ir para adelante va para atrás, las autoridades, la policía, todo eso es corrupción por todos lados. Los delincuentes entran por una puerta en la mañana, y en noche ya salen por otra porque dieron dinero. Entonces yo quiero que ellas se vayan de acá y que se vayan para Estados Unidos o algún otro país donde no tengan que pasar por eso. Que ellas puedan ser libres, tal vez no libres de todo peligro porque no las voy a poder tener en una burbuja y librarlas todo el tiempo porque allá van a tener que tener sus experiencias. Pero por lo menos si ellas necesitan ayuda, hay alguien que* ***si*** *las vaya a escuchar y* ***si*** *las vaya a poder apoyar simplemente porque son un ser humano y simplemente ser hombre o sea mujer tiene sus derechos. Yo estuve allá, estuve acá, y comparo los niveles de vida, los niveles de educación, los niveles de oportunidades, y prefiero que mis hijas salgan. Que no se queden acá."*

Rosita compared the opportunities that were available to her while she lived in the United States with the opportunities she had now living in Guatemala. She firmly believed that as they grew into women, her daughters would have a better life if they could leave Guatemala to live in the United States of another country that could provide them with better opportunities and where they would be respected as human beings. To

her, staying in Guatemala meant that her daughters would have to suffer similar experiences that she had to endure, and she did not want that. She was determined to figure out different avenues for them to leave.

Rosita's return and reintegration process was initially influenced by her role as a daughter. While she decided to return for her sibling's and mother's well-being, she faced many challenges with social reintegration as a young returnee woman in Guatemala. She struggled the most with having to battle everyone's misconceptions and stereotypes of women who lived in the U.S. as sexually promiscuous or easy. People's negative perceptions of her impacted Rosita in very deep ways, even leading to a sexual assault a few years after returning that resulted in a pregnancy. Rosita was enraged by the response of the legal and social systems that she relied on for support, believing that if she had stayed in the U.S. she would not have faced the same pain and struggle she had to endure in Guatemala. The challenges associated with her sexual assault led Rosita to be hospitalized due to severe depression and suicidal ideation. She lost faith in God, not understanding why she was being punished. While she planned on giving her daughters up for adoption once they were born, Rosita had a revelation when one of her babies had to be resuscitated, restoring her faith in God and deciding to keep both of her daughters. Since becoming a mother, Rosita's focus has shifted to developing herself as a professional to create opportunities for her and her daughters to eventually leave Guatemala seeking a better future and more respect as women.

Chapter 5: Beatriz

This chapter focuses on the experience of a 49-year-old woman named Beatriz, who initially migrated to the U.S in 1990 and applied for benefits through IRCA. However, due to arbitrary complications with her application, her and her husband were eventually placed in deportation proceedings and returned to Guatemala in 2010. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the social challenges that women in my "mothers" category face upon returning to Guatemala. Because their role as mothers was so central to their identity, women in this category primarily struggled with family separation and challenges related to reunification. For some, their decisions to return to Guatemala were largely influenced by their desire to reunify with children they had left behind years prior. However, as I will demonstrate with Beatriz's story, family separation also involved having to decide to separate from their American citizen children to ensure their well-being. I use Beatriz's story to demonstrate how their identities as mothers shaped women's return and reintegration experiences.

Return Process

Beatriz and her husband fought their deportation processes for several years with the help of lawyers but ultimately lost the battle in the fifth circuit. However, Beatriz was surprised by the differences in how she and her husband were treated, with him being detained at work and her being allowed to stay at home with her son throughout the process. Despite not being detained, Beatriz still felt like she was treated like a criminal, having to report to immigration authorities on a weekly basis. The whole process was

very frustrating and stressful for her, not only having to deal with the immigration system but also being solely responsible for selling the family's belongings before her and her son returned to Guatemala to reunify with her husband.

Beatriz recalls having to finally sign her order of deportation after her lawyers advised her that there were no other options for her and her husband. Their application had reached the fifth circuit and they were denied a stay of deportation.

> *"De plano dijimos si nos vamos a tener que ir pues porque no queda de otra. Pero en el caso de mi esposo, a el si lo fueron a detener en su trabajo. En el caso mío llegaron a la casa. Entonces me dijeron si no firmas, eso me entro temor a mi porque dijeron si no firmas en donde estés con tu hijo, ahí te vamos ir a traer. O sea como que a ellos no les importaban si el hijo miraba o no miraba la situación. Entonces dije yo bueno, y como mis abogados me habían asesorado, pues tienes que firmar porque ya no hay otra manera, ya fuimos al quinto circuito y ellos negaron. Ya no podemos hacer mas nada, ya no podemos pasar a ningún otro lado. Se hizo lo que se pudo."*

Beatriz recalls feeling confused with how different her and her husband's deportation proceedings were handled, as immigration officials went to his work and detained him one day but allowed her to stay at home with her son without detaining her. She did notice unmarked immigration enforcement cars near her home, which more than anything appeared to be threats to encourage her to sign her order of deportation. In her mind, immigration officials were not concerned with the well-being of her son, and if she

did not sign her deportation order, she might face the same fate as her husband, leaving her son alone as witness to her detention. Additionally, because her lawyers informed her that they had run out of options, Beatriz realized she had to sign her order of deportation. In other parts of her narrative, Beatriz shared that despite all the money they had spent on their lawyers' legal fees, she knew it was the right thing to do because this way she was not left wondering what might have happened if they had fought to do everything they could to stay in the U.S.

After her husband's deportation, Beatriz had to constantly check in with immigration officials while she stayed in the U.S. for several months to take care of extenuating tasks related to the family's belongings.

> *"Yo me quede precisamente a este tiempo, a principios de Julio o a finales de junio. [Mi esposo] ya cumplió 9 años de estar acá en Guatemala. Y pues teníamos carro, teníamos casa, teníamos una vida hecha allá. Yo me tuve que quedar vendiendo la casa. Pero También no fue un proceso fácil. Porque con ese proceso yo tenía cada semana yo me tenía que presentar a migración a reportarme. Por un tiempo sí me sentí muy mal cuando me tenía que ir a notificar todas las semanas porque era decir como si yo fuera una delincuente. Bueno tal vez así me catalogaron como una delincuente. (laughs) Eso sí como persona hiere los sentimientos de uno porque dice, bueno todavía aparte que se va a ir uno todavía tiene que ir a checar y ya mostrar el boleto cuando uno ya se va a ir."*

Beatriz felt like she was being treated like a criminal by being required to report to immigration officials every week. Apart from the pain of having to dispose of all the belongings that symbolized the life she had built in the U.S., she was also monitored and forced to demonstrate her intention to return to Guatemala by presenting her outgoing plane ticket. She expressed feeling hurt by this type of treatment.

However, although Beatriz had to check in weekly, she explained that she was told by immigration officials to take as much time as she needed to take care of business before returning to Guatemala.

> *"Pero me dijeron, tomate todo el tiempo que necesitas. Entonces ese fue el tiempo que yo aproveche para poder arreglar mis cosas, mandar mis cosas, ver qué íbamos hacer con los carros. Obviamente si nos trajimos los que usábamos cada uno para el trabajo, pero teníamos otro carro. No teníamos mucho tiempo que lo terminamos de sacar, estaba nuevo. Entonces también teníamos que ver como lo vendíamos para recuperar el dinero. O sea que fue una transición de cierta manera muy difícil y muy frustrante. Porque uno solo no es igual que dos personas verdad. Claro yo tenía, tengo, los tengo todavía, amigos que me ayudaron. Me decían hagamos esto, hagamos lo otro. Y en lo que mi hijo terminaba la escuela. Entonces cuando él (mi hijo) terminó la escuela empezó el otro ciclo, pero se quedó a medias. Y pues nos venimos, mi esposo en junio ya estaba acá y yo me vine en octubre, de ese mismo año que fue en el 2010.*

Entonces mi esposo decía mejor vende las cosas y con el dinero que agarras pues tal vez aquí las compramos."

Selling the family's belongings was her and her husband's way to recover some of the money they had invested throughout their time in the U.S. Because they had spent so much money on their lawyer's legal fees to fight their deportation cases, they felt like they needed to sell as many of their assets to ensure financial stability while reintegrating to Guatemala. However, apart from having to sell the family's belongings, Beatriz also had to take care of her son's needs as he started a new school year that he never got to finish. With her husband already in Guatemala, Beatriz felt alone throughout the process despite having the support of her friends.

Deportation not only impacted her and her husband, however. Beatriz recalls how the entire process also affected their son.

"Con en esa transición mi hijo también tuvo que ir a terapias. Con la edad que él tenía, estamos hablando que él tenia entre 6-8 años, como que también no entendía qué estaba pasando. Le hacían muchas preguntas, pero asi muy fuertes verdad. ¿qué pasaría si tus papas se van, y te dejan a ti?, que no se que."

As is common with deportation cases, Beatriz's son began therapy to assess the impact that his parents' deportation would have on the family. Through this process, he was asked questions about family separation that he couldn't fully understand as a young child. Even prior to deportation, Beatriz's son was already being exposed to the idea of

being separated from his parents. Conversations like the ones Beatriz's son was exposed to have the potential to deeply impact the emotional well-being of young children.

Beatriz's return process was challenging for her in several ways. She and her husband first had to accept their deportation orders after fighting for years to stay in the U.S. However, because immigration officials processed each of their cases differently, Beatriz found herself alone in the U.S. for several months, having to take care of extenuating tasks before her and her son could reunite with her husband in Guatemala. She felt like she was treated like a criminal, forced to check-in with immigration officials on a weekly basis, and prove that her intentions were to return to Guatemala. Additionally, Beatriz not only had to sell the family's belongings but also take care of her son on her own. Throughout the last few months in the U.S., Beatriz also observed the ways that her son's mental health and well-being was impacted by having to think about possible family separation. Taking everyone's well-being into consideration as a mother, the process of deportation impacted her on a very deep level.

ADAPTATIONS

Finally, after months of preparation, Beatriz and her son returned to Guatemala where they reunited with her husband. The family not only went through periods of challenges in establishing themselves financially but also through periods when they had to look internally to better understand the emotional processes that each of them was undergoing. As a family, they had to make difficult decisions that caused family separation. Having to be far away from her son proved to be Beatriz's main challenge

with reintegration, as her identity as a mother was central to her life's meaning. The nine years since her return to Guatemala were therefore focused on building a transnational relationship with her son to be able to support and guide him through his middle childhood, early adolescence, and young adulthood.

Beatriz explained that she and her husband's main focus was on establishing themselves financially during their initial stages of reintegration, which blinded them to the difficulties their son was having to adapt to Guatemalan society as well.

> *"Entonces en el caso de nosotros, al regresar nosotros pusimos un restaurante. O sea que nosotros tuvimos en qué enfocarnos cuando llegamos acá. No tuvimos esa transición de pasar porque todo había ocurrido, pero después de eso vino la depresión. En el año 2010, hasta finales de 2012, que fue que tuvimos nuestro restaurante, estuvimos enfocados en eso, en sentimos útiles, que nada había cambiado. No vinimos para acá [a Xela], nos quedamos en Antigua Guatemala que es un lugar muy turístico. La verdad uno solo en proveer, solo piensa en qué tengo que trabajar, que tenemos que abrir. Ya llegábamos tarde a la casa. Pero no nos dábamos cuenta que mi hijo estaba en depresión, pero no lo observamos porque nosotros estábamos ocupados."*

As a way to cope with their return, Beatriz and her husband focused the majority of their energy on the daily operations of their restaurant. They did not stop to think about why or how they were deported or realized that their son was struggling emotionally to adapt to Guatemala. It was not until their son was already in a deep depression that they

began to reconsider how their deportation impacted the family and began thinking about solutions.

Beatriz shared her and her husband's process of trying to figure out what was best for their son. Their friends in the U.S. had different opinions about what they needed to do to ensure their son's well-being. While some of them thought that they should send their son back to the U.S., others thought he was too young to be far away from their parents.

> *"Y allá [en Estados Unidos] témenos muchos amigos y decían, manden de regreso a [mi hijo]. Manden de regreso a [mi hijo]. Y otros decían no, él está muy pequeño para salir del nido, él tiene que estar con sus papás. Pero a partir de [los 12 años] él ha estado solo. Pero también no ha sido fácil. Esa parte para mi es muy muy difícil como mamá porque no pude estar cuando él salió de middle school, no pude estar cuando cuando salió de high school y muchas muchas cosas importantes. Pero bueno, el día de hoy yo le digo que el tiene que salir adelante. Incluso yo le digo, porque no te vienes a Guatemala y estudias acá. Pero él dice que él solo ve como Guatemala para viajar de turismo, pero no para vivir acá, aunque le gusta. Me dice, me gusta, me gusta convivir con la familia, pero esa no es mi vida. Y yo lo entiendo. No puedo ser egoísta en tenerlo cerca de mí físicamente cuando él tiene otras aspiraciones en la vida."*

Ultimately, Beatriz and her husband decided to send their son back to the U.S., not because of their friends' opinions, but because they knew that's what their son

wanted. They saw the deep depression that he had entered and, although he was only 12 years old, they felt that returning to the U.S. was in his best interest. Beatriz recalls how difficult of a decision it was to physically distance herself from her son. Although she wishes that they could be together, she understands that he has different goals and aspirations that would be limited if he lived in Guatemala, and thinks that forcing him to stay physically close would have been a selfish choice.

However, despite understanding that her son needed to return to the U.S., Beatriz expressed the ways the process of building a transnational relationship with her son and having to adjust to parenting from afar impacted everyone, including her and her son, emotionally.

> *"Aparte de todo lo que se gastó económicamente, lleva algo muy importante que es lo emocional verdad. Queda uno lastimado emocionalmente (quivering voice) y por muy largo tiempo. Yo a veces así le decía a mi hijo que él no fuera duro porque él se volvió así como una Tortuga con su caparazón bien dura. Y él decía que era porque él no iba permitir que nadie lo dañara. Y él decía, a mi no me importan los demás, solo me importo yo. Pero a mi me daba tristeza escuchar eso porque le digo yo que él piensa de esa manera porque no tal vez no quiere que nadie le haga daño porque ha tenido que estar solo… o sea los amigos son lindos, porque tenemos muchos amigos allá, son lindos, pero nada como los papás, porque al final los papás son los papás pues."*

Being separated from her son impacted the family in deep ways for many years. For her son, growing up alone made him feel the need to protect himself emotionally. He went through stages where he claimed that he did not care about anyone but himself. As a mother, listening to her son speak about not wanting to be hurt, and not wanting to be emotionally vulnerable, hurt Beatriz as well. She wanted her son to be able to rely on others and build healthy relationships and realized that despite having friends in the U.S. who were helping take care of her son, it was not the same as if she could be there to guide him herself

When I asked Beatriz if she had also gone through states of depression during her reintegration to Guatemala, she responded by explaining how she has handled her emotions differently than her son and her husband, something she believed has helped her avoid falling into a deep depression.

> *"Quizá yo no (pase por depression), fíjese. Yo me catalogo como muy sensible. Yo cada vez que hablaba con [una de mis amigas] ella era la que me escuchaba, entonces yo con ella como que me desahogaba. En cambio, mi esposo no. El, yo digo que no decía que sentía, o quizá no lo expresaba. Su manera era no hablar con nadie, quedarse encerrado en el cuarto. Y mi hijo es de la misma manera. Aunque he estado trabajando mucho con él y le digo que eso que uno sea, en el caso de ellos de ser varones, no es vergonzoso expresar lo que uno se siente. Es mas triste ser una persona dura y no poder expresar lo que uno siente. Aunque yo*

soy la más sensible de los tres no es una debilidad. Yo lo considero como un don. (laughs)"

Beatriz associated her ability to process her emotions with the support of friends as a personal strength. While she did not seek the help of a therapist, she was able to vent and express her sadness with a good friend. She also believes that her husband and her son had more difficulty with processing their emotions, and thus were more susceptible to depression, due to gender norms that make men feel ashamed for expressing their emotions.

However, despite feeling like she was able to avoid feeling extremely depressed, taking on the responsibility to be a parent transnationally was very difficult for Beatriz. She shared that while she attempted to work in Guatemala to contribute to her and her husband's expenses, she realized that doing so limited her ability to support her son because she could not be available to him when he needed her.

"El día de hoy yo creo que como mamá, como mujer, también no se me ha sido fácil. Como cuando yo trabajé, como que mi hijo perdió interés en el estudio. ¡Pero siempre hay drama, pues! (laughs) ¡Siempre hay drama! Porque, que me pasa esto, que me pasa el otro. [Entonces pare de trabajar para enfocarme otra vez en él, para asegurarme de que retomara sus estudios.] Yo sé que uno no puede resolver los problemas de los hijos todo el tiempo porque también tienen que aprender a que ellos mismos tienen que resolver las cosas. Pero a veces yo me siento culpable como mamá porque no puedo estar cerca."

While Beatriz knows that she cannot solve all of her son's problems and that he news to learn to resolve issues on his own, not being able to be physically close to her son when he faces challenges often makes Beatriz feel guilty and inadequate as a mother. She wishes she could be close to him to encourage him and guide him when he feels struggles. Through her interview, Beatriz shared many ways in which she continues to encourage her son to move forward and work hard to get ahead.

Beatriz believes that despite the distance and the struggles they face as a transnational family, they are fortunate as a family to be able to support each other from afar and still get to see each other when their son cab visit them.

> *"Cuando él viene acá pasamos horas y horas platicando. Eso es lo bonito de cuando viene a visitar, porque hay cosas que a veces se olvidan, esta uno en el teléfono, en una video llamada, pero se olvida verdad. Y pasa el tiempo y hasta que uno no está frente a frente le dice, te acuerdas de esa vez que hablamos, se me olvido contarte esto, lo otro. Pero son experiencias que nos han tocado vivir, pero que al final ahí si que, yo le digo a mi hijo, son experiencias difíciles, pero no son de muerte. Siempre le digo, y hasta el día de hoy yo se lo vuelvo a repetir, nosotros como familia estamos más unidos que las familias que viven juntas. Al final estamos contentos. El día de hoy estamos contentos, estamos tranquilos. Mi hijo por allá, nosotros por acá, pero no fue un proceso fácil."*

Beatriz describes her relationship with her family to be very close regardless of the physical distance they have had to endure. She revels in the moments when her son

visits her because they can interact more fully, sharing intimacy that they are unable to enjoy when they are not together. She explained, her family has found ways to be closer than a lot of families that are not separated by borders. She described that although it has not been easy, today their family has been able to achieve some happiness and tranquility.

As a woman whose identity centers on her motherhood, reintegrating into Guatemalan society has been challenging for Beatriz who saw the need to separate from her son after returning to Guatemala to ensure his well-being. While she knew that allowing her son to return to the U.S. was the right decision, she had to come to terms with having to build a transnational relationship with him to continue parenting him. Being physically distant from him often made Beatriz feel guilty and inadequate as a parent, especially when her son struggled with things she could not help him with from afar. However, during the time of our interview, Beatriz expressed having made peace with the situation, allowing her to create new meaning from her return and reintegration experiences.

FUTURE

Beatriz held a lot of hope for future reunification with her son. She explained that she left it up to God to determine if they would be together again soon, and while she hoped for the best, she was prepared for the worst. While her son had begun to wonder when he could apply to have his parents join him in the U.S. once again, Beatriz shared that she did not expect the process to be quick or easy. Having returned to Guatemala nine years before our interview, and because both Beatriz and her husband had been

banned from the U.S. for ten years after their deportation, they were both preparing to start inquiring about applying for a visa.

Beatriz shared that while she was hopeful that she would one day be able to return to the U.S. to be with her son, she was also ready in case that was not a possibility. She left her and her family's destiny up to God's will.

> *"Si está en los planes de Dios que volvamos a estar juntos así será y si no él sabrá porqué. Es lo que le digo a mi hijo, no pienses que esto es de aquí a mañana, esto es un proceso largo. Pero si tú dices que tienes la intención de que nosotros regresemos contigo, porque siempre nos dice, yo quiero traerlos, yo ya quiero que estén conmigo. El también anhela que estemos juntos, aunque cuando nos viene a visitar, estamos juntos, pero no es lo mismo. Incluso creo que antes de [que mi hijo cumpliera] 21 ya podía entrar en proceso si nosotros ya teníamos los 10 años [de regreso a Guatemala]. Pero como nosotros no hemos cumplido los 10 años, aún no se puede."*

As the 10th anniversary of their deportation was just one year away, Beatriz's family was preparing to figure out the next steps to apply for a visa through their American citizen son. As is common with visa applications from Central America, however, Beatriz advised her son to prepare himself for the long process ahead. While she knew that he wanted them to return to the U.S. just as much as she did and was hopeful that it would happen sometime soon, she was also hesitant to get her hopes up too high in case they encountered difficulties.

Additionally, Beatriz shared that she had friends in the U.S. who were also preparing themselves to find ways to get them back to the U.S. as soon as they could.

> *"Tenemos amigos allá que me han contactado estos meses y me dicen cuando cumplan los 9 años los dos, los 9, que ya los dos haya cumplido los 9 años, vamos a platicar y vamos a consultar abogados a ver qué necesitan hacer. Y mi hijo tiene esa esperanza. Pero le digo a mi esposo que todo este tiempo nos ha enseñado que debemos pensar que si se puede, pero también pensar del otro lado que tal vez no se puede. No es que uno sea negativo, pero han pasado muchas cosas en nuestra vida que uno tiene la esperanza que va pasar de esa manera pero en realidad no."*

While Beatriz and her husband could not apply for a visa until they had been in Guatemala for 10 years, their friends wanted to begin inquiring about the process a year ahead of time. Everyone, including Beatriz's husband, was ready to get back to life in the U.S. However, Beatriz was weary. She wanted everyone to be cautiously optimistic in case their applications were denied. She explained that her intention was not to be negative, but that life had taught her that being too hopeful that things will work out the way she wanted can lead to severe disappointment..

Despite wanting to live with her family in the U.S. again, there were limits to what Beatriz was willing to do to make her dream come true. She recalled a time when she was still in the U.S. while her husband was detained, and the topic of returning to the U.S. had already come up.

"Un día cuando yo fui a visitar [a mi esposo en el centro de detención], ya los últimos días que ya lo iban a mandar, encontré una señora y se acercó y me dijo, Y ¿ustedes de dónde es? Yo de Guatemala, le digo. Yo también soy de Guatemala, es que ahorita está mi familia acá, dijo. Pero si se quiere regresar mire, llamé a este número, y me dio un papelito. Pero la verdad nunca nunca me nació, porque le decía a mi esposo, yo siempre tuve miedo de regresar [sin papeles] porque cuando yo me fui para Estados Unidos yo me fui por avión."

Beatriz wanted to return to the U.S., but she wanted to do it with a visa. Despite getting information that might help her migrate clandestinely, she never seriously considered it as an option. She was afraid of traveling with the help of a coyote, like many migrants do, especially because she never had the experience the first time she migrated. Therefore, Beatriz was willing to wait for the legal process required to get a visa and was also prepared if she was unable to return at all.

Beatriz's return and reintegration process was defined by her role as a mother. Her son's well-being has always been her primary concern. During their deportation process, Beatriz worried about the impacts on his son's mental health. Upon returning to Guatemala, she was concerned that he was not adjusting well to being in a country that was unfamiliar to him. While she and her husband made the difficult decision to allow him to return to the U.S. Beatriz took the responsibility of becoming a transnational parent very seriously. She struggled to come to terms with being physically distant from her son, often feeling guilty or inadequate. However, as time went on, Beatriz was able to

make meaning of her family's situation, being grateful for the opportunities to connect with her son through phone and during his visits to Guatemala. Yet, she remained hopeful that she would be able to migrate to the U.S. again to reunite with her son after spending ten years in Guatemala. Beatriz's story is a reflection of the experiences of returnee mothers who are separated from their children for various reasons. While the stories of other mothers might not be exactly like hers, what unites all of their experiences is the concern they have for their children and their desire to reunite with them.

Chapter 6: Camila

This chapter focuses on the experience of a 65-year-old woman named Camila, who initially migrated to the U.S in her early 20's during the 1970s. Camila returned to Guatemala voluntarily after living and working in the U.S. for the majority of her adult life. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the social challenges that women in my "retirees" category face upon returning to Guatemala. As older women retired from their jobs or professions in the U.S., they saw a need to return to Guatemala in order to live a more independent life, especially due to the financial constraints of their social security pensions. Additionally, retirees' adult children often lived busy and demanding lives driven by their work schedules and family obligations that made it difficult to support their aging mothers. As I will demonstrate with Camila's story, retired returnees face special challenges that shape their return and social reintegration into Guatemalan society.

RETURN PROCESS

Through her university studies, Camila recalls having an awakening about how American imperialism had impacted her life without even realizing it. She shared with me that she remembers reading the books "Open Veins of Latin America" and "Bitter Fruit," where she learned about the Guatemalan Civil War and how American intervention served to push economic migrants like her north into Mexico and the United States. After learning more Guatemalan history, she began to think about returning to Guatemala.

"Me di cuenta que no era sólo yo, que había más gente que pensaba igual, pero estábamos como dicen en la boca del monstruo, en las entrañas verdad. Y fue cuando dije, el día que yo me retire, ojalá que mis hijos se quieran ir conmigo, pero me voy para Guatemala. Pero fue algo a través de mi educación académica y también me di cuenta que yo fui expulsada y soy exiliada económica por las mismas políticas. Porque esa política de empobrecernos no era de ese momento, ese era el plan. Ya venía ese empobrecimiento, esa manera que seas manos de obra barata, que te veas desesperada. O sea todo eso para mí viene conectado. Y pensé que cuando yo me retirara, aunque sea 10 centavos de mi retiro no se los dejaba en el norte, porque ya les había, yo les dejé toda mi fuerza física de mi juventud. Entonces ya les dejé toda mi energía toda toda toda mi energía hizo mucho movimiento económico, social, como sea, movió mucha economía. Fueron 41 años de mover economía en Estados Unidos, y dije que lo que me tocaba de retiro no lo dejaba, me lo traía para acá para que siguiéramos porque aquí, aquí se necesita. Allá ya están los que les gusta consumir, aquí están los que queremos hacer algo."

Camila realized that she had spent all of her youthful energy helpings build the same empire that had caused her to leave Guatemala in the first place. She realized the ways she had been used as cheap labor when she worked in factories in Guatemala getting paid just pennies a day. Camila had shared with me all about the struggles she faced when she was a little girl when her family could only afford to eat beans and tortillas or cornflakes. The desperation she felt from the severe poverty she endured all of

her childhood was what urged her to migrate to the U.S. After contributing to the U.S. economy for 41 years, she decided that upon retiring, she would no longer contribute to a system that continued to oppress her community, she made up her mind to return to Guatemala and invest her security pension there instead.

Additionally, Camila shared that as she grew older, she no longer felt at home in the United States. She described that because her children's lives were so busy, she began feeling like she was becoming a burden in their lives.

> *"La otra razón por la que decidí regresarme fue porque no quiero estar en el medio de mis hijos. ¿Entonces a qué me quedo? ¿Me quedo a ser estorbo? ¿Me quedo como una reliquia? El dinero tampoco va a ser suficiente para mí para quedarme allá. Entonces es por eso verdad, dos razones por las que me vine son esas. Comprendí lo que es el sistema de los Estados Unidos y no funciona para mí. Es un sistema muy muy frío."*

The hustle and bustle of American life made her children more concerned about their economic advancement than about Camila's health and well-being. She did not want to become a relic in her children's life by burdening them financially and getting in the middle of their relationships. As I will share in chapter 7, as Camila's health suffered, she felt abandoned by her children. They always seemed busy with work and their own families to worry about Camila. Additionally, Camila realized how expensive nursing homes were. Besides not wanting to live in a nursing home or even be able to afford to, Camila knew that could not survive with her social security pension in the U.S. Thus,

wanting to live a more independent and tranquil life in retirement also influenced Camila to return to Guatemala.

When I asked Camila about her children's reactions to her decision to return to Guatemala, Camila shared that they did not seem bothered at all. Her children were supportive of her decision, expressing they were glad that she was doing what she wanted.

> *"Un día a mi hija le dije que ya estaba pensando que me voy a retirar y cuando terminé de trabajar me voy a ir a Guatemala. ¡Guau, madre qué bueno! Sí, yo pienso que ya no quiero seguir aquí, mucho frío, mucho calor, me duelen los pies. Madre lo que tú decidas. Ay qué bien madre estás viviendo donde te gusta. Viendo dónde te gusta. Y tienen razón, estoy viviendo donde me gusta, aparte de mi vejez, yo me estoy disfrutando mis últimos años de mi vida bien disfrutados como a mí me gusta."*

There seemed to be a bit of sarcasm when Camila shared her daughter's reactions. Perhaps part of her wished that her daughter would have tried to convince her to stay or asked why she was no longer happy living in the U.S. Instead, however, her daughter's response was an encouragement to "live where she wanted to live." However, after some thought, Camila seemed settled and agreed with her daughter's statement. Camila was enjoying the last stage of life in Guatemala, a place she wanted to pour her heart and remaining energy into.

Camila's return process was influenced by personal, interpersonal, and systemic factors. As a retired woman, she knew she could not survive in the United States with the

small social security pension she received every month. She also began to see that her adult children were all busy living their lives and did not want to feel like a burden to them. Additionally, Camila was tired of contributing to a system that had caused her to migrate 41 years before her return. Becoming educated about Guatemalan society and American intervention and imperialism made her realize that she wanted to contribute to building something in Guatemala. Based on all the factors outlined here, Camila decided to return to Guatemala at the age of 61.

ADAPTATIONS

As an older woman, Camila saw her world through an analytical lens. As she reintegrated into Guatemalan society, Camila experiences judgments and social clashes with people around her as well as her family. First, she observed how people's general perceptions of migrants made it difficult for returnees to express difficult experiences and feelings. Additionally, as a woman, she noticed that people were bothered by the ideology that Camila returned to Guatemala. The daily social interactions with family and community members made her feel like she had to constantly limit what she said in order to avoid conflicts. Feeling at odds with everyone all the time made it difficult for Camila to fully integrate into Guatemalan society.

Camila expressed the need for returnees to explore their emotional and mental well-being. She was unsure exactly what the reason was behind the silence that she experienced but shared that she thought it was related to the public's perception of migrants in general.

"No sé si los demás tienen pena, vergüenza, de llegar al sentimiento, porque yo no creo que sólo a mí me afecte esta salida. O tal vez le falta tiempo, más tiempo allá, para regresar y sentir lo que falta, pienso yo. Pero quienes van, los que nos vamos más tiempo yo creo que sí hay un espacio que debemos que curar. Yo pienso que no se ha tocado ese tema psicológico del retornado. Esas son cosas emocionales por la migración y al tu sentir esa emoción, sí hay un problema. Es que sí hay algo que nos duele y si pudiéramos externalizarlo en un grupo. Si todos pudiéramos sernos sinceros creo que nos aliviaría mucho. Porque cada vez que yo hablo de migración, igual que cuando hablo de violencia doméstica, más lo habló menos me duele. Pero nosotros no hemos hablado. Yo creo que la gente como están esperando que les contemos maravillas verdad."

Migrants talking about the negative experiences they had or venting about the challenges they face upon return breaks the idealization that Guatemalans often have about living in the U.S. Camila believes that it is possible that feelings of shame may be part of the reason why returnees don't express their feelings. While returnees may have varying degrees of challenges upon their return based on how many years they lived in the U.S., Camila believes that it was necessary for returnees to create support groups to talk to each other about how they felt about returning. As had been her experience with talking about the severe domestic violence she endured with her husband, Camila knew that talking about their experiences as returnees would be very healing.

However, Camila also shared that perhaps returnee's silence about their experiences had much more to do with much broader Guatemalan or even Latin American cultural norms around sharing emotional processes.

> *"Aquí en Guatemala nunca, no sé si en toda Latinoamérica, la gente nunca le ha dado importancia a su proceso emocional. Ha pasado siempre igual que cuando pasó la guerrilla verdad. Ha habido un montón de aperturas para que la gente venga hablar y no vienen, porque esas son cosas, ay eso ya pasó. Ya usted mejor siga hacia adelante. Pero no, yo creo que hay un proceso de curarse. No sé los demás qué pensarían, pero para mi hay momentos que sale una lágrima, sale una cosa es que hay algo más adentro. O sea que aquí no hay un apoyo para los retornados y somos exiliados económicos, aunque no se nos ha visto así."*

Historically, people in Guatemala have not sought places to talk to each other about emotional experiences. Camila gives the example of people staying quiet or leaving their emotions unprocessed during the civil war. While there were spaces that were created for people to talk about how they felt, no one showed up. Culturally, people always encourage each other not to dwell on their challenges, to keep moving forward instead of doing healing work. Camila understood all the intricacies and interconnections of the reasons for her migration during the 1970s as well as the struggles she was currently facing. Camila knew that her emotional process was as much tied to the civil war as it was to her migration journey and return experiences. She believed that she and other returnees had much healing to do.

In particular many of the topics that Camila felt the need to process and talk about with other returnees was the frustration she felt with traditional gender norms. She expressed that Guatemalan society was reluctant to change its patriarchal and sexist ways.

> *"La gente es uy, por ejemplo, lo que es lo cultural verdad, hay cosas que no se pueden cambiar. Por ejemplo, como aquí en Cajolá y en Guatemala también el machismo, el control. Hay un machismo tremendo todavía. Pero aquí por ejemplo si voy a una fiesta o a una reunión de gente puede ser una fiesta, puede ser un velorio, cuando uno va a entrar, tiene que entrar primero el hombre que viene con nosotros. Dan ganas de echarse uno adelante, pero sabe que uno les está quebrando sus reglas, pero yo como soy de otro lugar, no tengo porqué venir a romper las reglas. O sea, yo sé que ningún hombre tiene derecho a decir que va a entrar primero. Si yo ya llegué, hay que esperarlo que él entre primero y se presente y ahí vamos todas las mujeres en fila."*

Camila was very frustrated that she often had to follow gender norms that she did not agree with. She explained that when women go to any type of gathering, regardless of if it is a party or funeral, they must wait for the men they are with to enter first. While Camila wishes she could just break the patriarchal norms that make her feel constrained, doing so would mean being judged as a disrespectful foreigner that comes to break everyone's rules. Describing herself as someone who is from somewhere else is very telling in Camila's narrative. Having spent 41 years away from Guatemala makes her feel like she does not belong, as she's constantly at odds with everything around her.

People's comments describing her as an outsider also came from her own family. Camila recalls an incident with her brother in which he implied that her beliefs did not matter, that she was in Guatemala now, and needed to act accordingly.

"También vienen con sus palabras, ah es que como vos venís de allá, pero aquí tus babosadas no valen. Inclusive, en mi familia, un día estábamos sentadas y mi hermano llegó:

Hermano: *'Buenas noches y no sé qué. ¿qué tal están?'*

Yo: *'Bien.' El se sentó y dijo,*

Hermano: *'Yo tengo ganas de café.'*

Yo: *'Ahí está la cafetera, está la cafetera lista.'*

Hermano: *'Ah no pero yo ya me senté.'*

Yo: *'Pero levántate, anda agarra tu café.'*

Hermano: *'Vos con esas tus babosadas, aquí no te valen. Vos no estás allá, vos estás en Guatemala. Es más anda tráeme mi café y me pasas unas dos tortillas.'*

Yo: *'Con permiso voy al baño.' Pero mi hermana se paró y le sirvió."*

As a returnee woman, Camila faced constant conflicts with people around her because she came to Guatemala with a different ideology than everyone around her. While Camila described herself as a feminist, she knew that people judged her for living alone and the way she spoke so openly about what she believed in. It was hard for her to feel like people did not want to hear what she had to say and thought she was disrespectful for asking for respect as a woman. The messages she constantly received from others was that she needed to be of service to men regardless of their relationship to

her or how old they were. She was not allowed to take up space without a man present by her side.

Camila went on to explain that because of the way women are judged in Guatemala, other returnee women intending to rebuild their lives and find a partner would be subjected to great scrutiny.

> *"Pienso que si uno, no mi caso verdad, pero si uno quisiera rehacer su vida con una pareja a uno lo ven como una persona más liberal, más liberada. Entonces eso yo me imagino, aunque no vengo buscando pareja, pero es lo que creo que va encontrar la mujer que viene con un pensamiento como el mío y quiere buscar pareja aquí. Falta un poquito de equidad porque no quiere decir que en Estados Unidos no hay machismo. Uff, hay machismo. Es horroroso también verdad. Pero hay un poquito más de apertura allá que aquí al decir feminismo, que yo soy feminista significa que voy a seguir luchando por una equidad verdad."*

While she knew that the U.S. was not exempt from sexism and patriarchy, she still saw that there were more opportunities to open dialogue about women's equity. However, as she shared in other parts of her interview, Camila explained that returnee women with feminist points of view are perceived as sexually easy. This was corroborated by other women in my study, especially younger women who, as Camila explained, were looking to rebuild their lives and find a partner in Guatemala.

Apart from patriarchal ways of thinking, Camila also felt like there were a lot of judgments about religion in Guatemala. Again comparing Guatemalan society with the U.S., Camila explained that because Guatemala was colonized by protestant and orthodox

Christians as well as Roman Catholics, other forms of religion like the Mayan cosmovision were not accepted or openly talked about.

> *"Aquí hay un poquito todavía de atraso de muchas cosas, por ejemplo, la idea religiosa. La gente en Estados Unidos tiene sus ideas religiosas, pero acepta la idea del otro sin estar tomando en cuenta muchas cosas. Pero aquí no porque aquí usted tiene que ser creyente de Dios, o usted es como expulsado. O si uno habla de la cosmovisión maya. Ah no, eso son brujos, usted está expulsada. O sea, es un país bien conquistado religiosamente con el cristianismo, ya sea cristianismo protestante o cristianismo ortodoxo y romano. Entonces la gente, se limita a uno a hablar con toda la gente de ciertas cosas. Solo hay ciertos grupitos donde uno puede hablar.*

Camila shared that having contrasting religious views, just like having contrasting views on gender norms, would often mean being expelled from society. While there were small groups were different people could talk about their religious beliefs, they were generally very small.

Readjusting to living in Guatemala proved difficult for Camila, as she felt like she was constantly at odds with everyone and everything. As a migrant in general, Camila felt like society had misconceptions and stereotypes of what life was like for in the U.S. She realized that there weren't many spaces where she could openly talk about the difficulties she faced in the U.S. or upon returning because migrants are often silent due to shame or fear of being judged. As a woman, Camila felt judged by the community and her family for challenging traditional gender norms. She was frustrated that she was

expected to serve and obey men around her regardless of her relationship to them or how old they were. She also saw how people with different points of view or religious beliefs were ostracized and expelled from society. The combination of all the factors addressed here made it difficult for Camila to feel like she could ever fully reintegrate into society.

FUTURE

Despite often feeling lost, Camila found hope and direction for her future in Guatemala. She shared with me that one of the greatest experiences upon returning was being able to provide a home for her now adopted eight-year-old son.

> *"Pienso que, que bueno en este mi camino, apareció [mi hijo adoptado]. Que bueno que apareció en mi camino, porque al venir yo aquí con esta mentalidad fue difícil. Que bueno verdad, que en este momento había alguien que podía venirme acompañar, que pudo ser mi compañero porque también si no estuviera esa necesidad de él, yo estuviera para arriba y para abajo haciendo otras cosas. Estaría metida en más cosas, pero yo ahorita tengo que moderar a dónde voy, cómo hago porque tengo el compromiso [de cuidarlo]. Y pues éste es un regalo. Después de tanto andarme extraviando verdad, por lo menos encontré un árbol fuerte en que me voy a apoyar.*

Taking on the responsibility of caring for her son gave her something to focus on and kept her grounded. Camila believed that if it were not for him, she would likely be involved in many other projects apart from the ones she was already a part of. She also described her son as a great companion during a time in her life when she felt lost and

alone. To Camila, her son's presence was a gift that gave her strength, someone she could lean on, like a tree, while at the same time taking care of him.

As she had previously mentioned, adopting her son gave her a reason to invest her pension money to contribute to Guatemala. Additionally, Camila explained that she needed to continue working in Guatemala to leave something positive behind.

> *"Yo necesito hacer el trabajo de aquí para dejar algo positivo en la vida verdad. Y qué bueno también que ese dinero y es energía que fui a dar se va a invertir en una persona que lo necesita, mi hijo. También pienso que ha sido una de las cosas, y unas cosas que disfruto, la alegría, la compañía del niño. Y de ahí estoy retornándole a la vida algo por los buenos momentos. Una en la vida también siempre que dejar huella. No sólo puedas venir a comer y a bailar. Tienes que dejar algo positivo, que no sólo es tu familia inmediata o tu compañero, es parte del mundo verdad. Entonces mi familia inmediata está bien, no les hace falta nada, entonces antes de irme tengo que apoyar a un grupo o alguien que lo necesite. Entonces yo puedo hacer mi visión como ser humano de dejar algo, aunque no sea mi sangre.*

Camila explained that her biological children were all doing well, and didn't need anything from her. Therefore, she was able to focus all of her resources to invest in her adopted son. She believed that to make meaning out of her life, she could not just come to this world to enjoy life, but give back to someone who needed help regardless of if they were blood-related or not. Camila was committed to give back and leave her mark on the world.

Apart from taking care of her son, Camila was also involved in community organizations, where she gave her time to create opportunities for indigenous women to train in vocational professions and tutor children who needed extra help with school.

> *"Si, me ha ayudado [involucrarme en la comunidad]. He hecho muchos cambios, tanto en el trabajo con las mujeres como lograr abrir el círculo de ayudando con tareas. Aunque el gobierno sabe que este es un pueblo analfabeto, no han hecho ningún programa para ayudar. Este programa de ayudar con tareas que logre abrir ningún lugar lo tiene. Lo que tienen en la capital son tutores privados. Si tienes dinero tienes tutores privados que te van a ayudar en matemáticas. Hay anuncios sin fin de anuncios de gente dando tutoría privadas. Pero eso sólo es al alcance la gente rica que pueden pagar 20 quetzales por hora, 40 diarios. aquí 40 los gana una persona en un día. No van a pagar eso por una clase de matemáticas. Entonces algo que sí me alegra es esto que se abrió aquí para ayudar a estos niños que no tienen, no tendrían esa oportunidad de tener un apoyo. Yo creo que ahí ya dejé una mi miguita."*

Community service helped Camila feel like she was of use as a retired returnee. With her experience as a former teacher in the U.S., she decided to start a tutoring program with a local organization where she and other people in the community provided tutoring for many indigenous children. As she described, although the government knows that towns like Cajola are illiterate, they have failed to create social programs to help children and adults learn to read. Therefore, Camila took it upon herself to start a program that was very necessary for her community. She was proud to say that even in

Guatemala City, tutoring programs like her were non-existent. Only children whose families had enough money to pay what some people in Guatemala make in one day of work can hire a tutor to help them with school tasks.

Camila returned to Guatemala feeling somewhat abandoned by her children. She did not want to feel like a burden to them as she grew older. However, Camilia's return to Guatemala was also influenced by her education. As she learned more about the history of American imperialism and intervention in Central America, she realized that she no longer wanted to contribute to American society. Therefore, she returned intending to invest her time and money to help build a better Guatemala. However, upon returning, she became frustrated with how others perceived and treated her as a migrant and a woman. There were few spaces for her to talk about the challenges she had faced in the U.S. as well as the difficulties she was experiencing as a returnee. Additionally, as a woman, she felt frustrated about having to follow gender norms that expected to serve and obey men. Despite the challenges she faced, however, Camila continued to strive to contribute and leave something behind. She adopted an eight-year-old boy who had experienced homelessness before her arrival and took the responsibility of taking care of him very seriously. Additionally, Camila invested her time tutoring indigenous children in her community and helping build opportunities for indigenous women to learn vocational jobs. Being of use to her community and leaving her "little morsel" behind was how Camila made meaning out of her experience as a retired returnee.

Chapter 7: Challenges

My aim in this chapter is to demonstrate how all my participants shared a collective experience, including challenges and positive aspects of their return to Guatemala. An initial glance of the data set made the experiences of each woman seemingly unique. It was difficult to find similarities or themes across interviews on their return process. Only after more in-depth analysis did I begin to see generational themes in my data set, with younger women deeply identifying with their roles and expectations as daughters, middle-aged women feeling a heavy responsibility as mothers separated from their children, and older women entering a stage in their life where retirement was the biggest influence in their return.

However, I was left still feeling like I needed to find common themes across my data set. As I thought through ways in which all my participants were connected, separating their return experiences into challenges seemed incomplete because doing so simplified what was happening in their lives. Heuristically, I concluded that while all of my participants experienced similar difficult and positive aspects of returning to Guatemala, within the same context of return, what could be a difficulty for one woman, might be positive for another woman, or even the same woman, at different points in time. Additionally, some challenges and positives of return were two sides of the same coin, which served to point to the complexities of their experiences.

Among the common challenges my participants experienced included family separation manifested in many forms, including forceful separation, consequential separation, and conscious, purposeful separation. Family separation was also

compounded by travel restrictions due to the women's and their family's immigration status and work responsibilities. Apart from being separated from their families, my participants described having difficulty readjusting and reintegrating to their families still living in Guatemala as well as to Guatemalan society. In a sense, it was like being a stranger in their own family and in their own country. As previously stated, however, due to the complexity of their experiences, becoming separated from certain members of their family also meant reunification with family members that had stayed behind in Guatemala many years prior. Additionally, while it felt strange to reconnect with family and reintegrate into Guatemalan society, my participants also saw the opportunities to rebuild family connections and create community, especially with other returnees.

FAMILY SEPARATION

Family separation looked differently across my data set. At times, family separation was simply a consequence of my participants' circumstances, being forced to return to Guatemala through deportation without any say. In other cases, family separation was a sacrifice they made for the family unit. Yet for others, however, family separation was very intentional, a decision they consciously made to improve the lives of their children or to avoid creating what they perceived to be a burden of growing older. Regardless of the reason for separation, this was a heavily emotional process for every woman.

Daughters

Most of my participants in the daughters group returned to Guatemala during the brink of their adulthood. At just 18 years old, they found themselves suddenly living

alone without their parents in a country they had very little connection to or familiarity with. Rosita's experience with family separation came after her and her family in the United States received news that her sister, who was diagnosed with Schizophrenia, had been sexually assaulted in her own home in Guatemala. While Rosita's mom began making plans to return to Guatemala to care for Rosita's sister, she had a newborn baby in the United States. Rosita's return to Guatemala would mean that she would have to take care of her baby brother who desperately needed his mom at such a tender age. Therefore, Rosita volunteered to return to Guatemala to help her sister instead. However, returning to Guatemala brought on many mixed feelings for Rosita, who began realizing the implications of her sacrifice.

> *"Entonces cuando yo regresé a Guatemala estaba feliz porque regresaba a mi país, regresaba a ver a mi familia que se había quedado acá. Pero estaba triste porque había dejado a mi mamá allá, a mis hermanos allá [...] Llegué a mi casa y solo estaba mi hermana porque mi abuelita no estaba. Ella estaba en los Estados Unidos [...] Yo lloré y lloré. Incluso, yo llegué el 22 de diciembre, estaba a dos días de navidad. Mi navidad la pase con unos vecinos, pero a la media noche me encerré y me encerré a llorar, extrañando a mi mama (voice quivering), extrañando a mi familia [...] O sea, es un día que yo nunca voy a olvidar. Era mi primera navidad sola. Había pasado navidades con mi abuelita, aunque mi mamá no estaba, pero esa vez no estaba ni ella."*

The process of separating from her family was very emotional for Rosita, as her voice began to quiver immediately when she began touching on the topic. It appeared to

me throughout my interview with Rosita that everything she ever wanted was to be with her mother. In fact, the main reason she made the journey to the U.S. all on her own when she was just 11 years old was to be reunited with her mom. Making this sacrifice for her entire family meant that she had to be separated from her mom once again. While she may have experienced similar feelings had she arrived during any other time of the year, arriving to a nearly empty house during Christmas, a time when people spend time with their family, compounded the feelings of loneliness & loss and making her miss the love and security provided by her family.

Family separation for daughters meant that they had to go from being girls guided by their family, to being women navigating the world and an unfamiliar country on their own. Following her description of her experience with family separation, Rosita describes a type of awakening to having to not only be responsible for herself, something she was completely unfamiliar and inexperienced with, but also becoming responsible for her sister, who had special needs due to her schizophrenia diagnosis.

> *"Tuve que adaptarme a algo diferente porque de niña me lo daban todo. No me preocupaba por lo que pasaba afuera, si había violencia, si había que pagar una factura, si había que pagar luz, agua, colegio, yo no me daba cuenta de esas cosas. Entonces yo ya al regresar y ya ser prácticamente casi mayor de edad ya tenía que tomar mis propias responsabilidades. Entonces me fue bien difícil. Todo lo que yo había vivido allá, a pesar de que yo ya era más grande iba de la mano con mi mama, y al regresar acá ya nadie me agarraba a mi de la mano. Al contrario, yo tenía que tomar de la mano a mi hermana y guiarla. Que ella me*

siguiera a mi y no había nadie al frente al que yo tenía que seguir. Entonces era, fue difícil."

Here Rosita describes feeling protected while growing up, not having to worry about adult responsibilities. In fact, she explains being completely unaware of them until she was launched into the caretaker role for her sister. All of a sudden, she became aware of all the responsibilities that came with being on her own as well as being responsible for her sister's well-being. For Rosita, this was one of the hardest consequences of family separation because she felt like she had no guidance for how to proceed with all the new responsibilities. Other daughters also reported this type of abrupt awakening to adulthood, missing their family's guidance during the tumultuous time of their return.

Mothers

The mothers in my data set both experienced family separation in a very deep way although at different periods in time and in different ways during their return experience. Beatriz made the conscious decision to send her son back to the United States after he began experiencing a deep depression due to his difficulty adapting to living in Guatemala after spending his childhood in the United States.

"Entonces nosotros le dijimos, sabes que Christopher, nosotros estamos pensando en regresar a Xela, que es de donde somos. Pero también estábamos pensando, ¿qué quieres tu? ¿Te quieres regresar a Houston? Y cuando le dijimos eso, él dijo, si, yo me quiero regresar. Para nosotros eso fue difícil porque es nuestro único hijo. Y esa es la parte difícil para mi, hasta el día de hoy. Y creo que siempre lo va a ser (crying), haberme perdido muchas cosas importantes de la vida de mi hijo.

perdón (*crying*), porque esa parte no la he superado. [Si, lo] más difícil es el no poder haber estado con mi hijo, o sea haberme despejado, despegado de él desde los 12 años hasta el día de hoy."

Beatriz's return experience was deeply defined by having to be separated from her son. Throughout the interview, she described extensively all the ways in which she felt frustrated and sad at not being able to be there for her son, who spent his adolescence and early adulthood living with family friends in the United States while he finished high school and navigated trying to go to college. While Beatriz constantly made efforts to support her son via phone, she expressed frustration about being far away when her son had to wake up at 5 am to take 3 buses to get to school, about not being at his high school graduation, about not being able to help him fill out the FAFSA when he was applying to go to college, among many other challenges. It was clear to me that Beatriz was so attuned to her son that she felt like many of the challenges he experienced being alone in the U.S. were her own. Ultimately, distance from her son was Beatriz's biggest anguish. In fact, she lived for the moments when her son had the opportunity to visit her and her husband in Guatemala.

Porque es cierto, viene a visitarnos, pero muy poquito tiempo, si al máximo 2 semanas. Y nosotros felices, cuando él viene yo soy la más feliz de todos. Así dice mi esposo, aprovecha el tiempo que tienes para pasar con él, y es lo que hago. Cuando él viene, yo feliz, pero cuando ya se empieza a ir, los días ya falta 1 o 2 días para que el regrese, empiezo con la ansiedad. Y hay un par de semanas que yo quedo muy triste."

The experience of separation from her son has not been numbed or become easier as time has passed. Beatriz continues to feel the same intensity in the experience as she did when he first moved back to the U.S., and she relives the feelings of anxiety and sadness every time he visits and leaves again. As she said, being far away is something she feels she has not yet, or will ever, overcome.

Retirees

Family separation for retirees was much less consequential, and much more of an active and conscious decision. Having spent decades in the United States meant that their American born and raised children were adults with their own families to take care of. The implications and consequences of having grown up in American culture made retiree women feel somewhat abandoned as older mothers. As described by Camila, retirees therefore made the decision to return to Guatemala to avoid their fears of spending their elderly years in retirement homes or become a burden to their children.

> *"La cultura es diferente. Tal vez sí podría si se propusiera alguien a cuidar a un su abuelo, a un su familiar. Lo cuido, mi mujer y yo nos vamos a turnar, que ella trabaje, porque esa es mi responsabilidad moral [...] O sea, pero allá nadie quiere dejar de trabajar porque quieren de andar con el último estilo de Nike, quieren andar con la mejor ropa, el mejor perfume. Victoria Secret es solamente para limpiarse los pies verdad, pero si Guchi [...] El abandono por la carrera es en general no es de otros, es de mis hijos también. Cómo te dijera, cuando yo me enfermé una vez que me lastimé la rodilla, llegaba mi hija, '¡Hi mami!' y yo '¡Hi Bibi!' Pero se iba a meter al cuarto con su marido. En la mañana no me decía,*

mamá te hice tu café. Ella, '¡Mom, estoy tarde!' En lo que se pinta, en lo que se secaba el pelo, se pasaba la brocha, y lo que estaba arreglándose, en lo que estaba hablando con su marido la agarraba el tiempo [...] Ella nunca se dijo mamá, cómo desayunas, y en la tarde como teníamos Peanut Butter, casi siempre yo estuve comiendo Peanut Butter sandwich. Y no es que no me quiera, es que la cultura de allá es que es de avance [...] Ella nunca se atrevió a decirle a su marido tú trabajas y yo cuido a mi mama."

While Camila understood that her relationship with her daughter was in many ways shaped by the capitalist culture her children grew up in, there was part of her that felt very abandoned by her children, especially her daughter. She noticed the differences in family dynamics and aging between Guatemalan and American society and realized that her daughter was preoccupied with work and advancement, and the little time she had left was dedicated to her daughter's relationship with her husband. She felt especially abandoned during times when her health suffered, and she felt like she needed additional support from her daughter that she was unable or unwilling to provide.

[En los nursing homes] no es tu familia que te está cuidando, sino es gente que le pagas. Entonces ya hasta ahí todavía como viejo eres fuente de empleo para ese sistema empujante. Y el sistema gana porque te están cuidando desde, les estás pagando, le estás pagando por qué te cuiden. En las familias en Guatemala nadie está pagando para que lo cuiden. Está haciendo parte la familia y parte de un proceso de vida.

Here Camila describes her observations of the differences between how Guatemalan and American families care for their aging parents. While American families place their parents in nursing homes, where they spend their last years alone, Guatemalan families take on the moral responsibilities to care for their parents even if that means they must stop working to do so. Camila noticed that this is yet another way in which American culture feeds into capitalism by having to pay hefty amounts of money for nursing home services. As Camila described throughout her interview, the reasons for her return to Guatemala were all related to not wanting to be a burden in the lives of her adult children as well as refusing to continue feeding the American capitalist system. It is important to note, however, that Camila felt a sense of abandonment prior to returning to Guatemala, and her return and decision to separate from her children was the consequence of those feelings. Unlike other women, the feelings came prior to the separation.

While some of them, including the women whose quotes are presented above, were forced to separate from their children or mothers due to deportation, others made the conscious decision or sacrifice to separate from them because they believed that is what was in the best interest of their family members. Regardless of the reason, family separation brought on feelings of loneliness, anguish, frustration, and abandonment for my participants. Most of the women I interviewed had been back in Guatemala for many years, sometimes decades. However, the emotions they described associated with family separation were always tender, as if no time at all had passed since they had to say goodbye to their loved ones. These seemed to be wounds that were unhealable and

reopened when memories and conversations surfaced, or their family members visited them sporadically and then were forced to become separated once again upon their departure. Of all other common themes across my data set, family separation impacted the women the most deeply.

TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

Being restricted from travel and migration to and from the United States compounded their family separation experiences, as it created barriers for women to reunite with or visit children, parents, and siblings. Because many of the women's family members living in the United States were undocumented and leaving the U.S. would mean not being able to return, travel restrictions to and from the U.S. created barriers to see each other. Their inability to cross borders meant that my participants went years without seeing their family members and lived with the uncertainty of whether they would ever be reunited again.

Daughters

Three out of the four women in my daughters group left close family members in the United States upon returning to Guatemala. For them, the uncertainty of not knowing if they would ever see their parents again was very real. Here Isabel describes having to decide whether to return to Guatemala or stay in the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant, and what either of those choices meant regarding family separation.

> *Entonces era así como muy obvio de que tenía que decidir si me iba a quedar ahí de ilegal o si me iba a regresar, pero allá también con bastante dificultad para regresar. Entonces tenía que escoger cómo ¿dónde vas a estar, si vas a estar con*

tu familia en Guatemala o si vas a estar con tu familia en Estados Unidos? [...] Cualquiera decisión que tomará era no ver a una mitad de la familia. Si yo quisiera iría de ilegal a los Estados (laughs), pero sería más fácil estar allá y tener que volver a ver a mi papá. Es difícil, no ganas, en todas pierdes y en todas ganas algo, pero no ganas totalmente en ninguna situación.

As she explains, regardless of which decision she made, it would imply not being able to see one of her parents. If she were to remain in the United States as an undocumented immigrant meant not being able to see her dad frequently, who lives in Guatemala, unless she was willing to give up not being able to return to the U.S. She ultimately chose to return because, as she described in other parts of her interview, she knew living a life without papers is not easy, especially when she was ordered to return by immigration enforcement. However, the implications of this decision mean that she cannot visit her mom who lives in the United States. As she states, she could migrate again without documentation, but at this point it would have been simpler if she had made the choice to stay in the U.S. during the time of her deportation. There seemed to be a great sense of loss for Isabel because, as she stated, she could not completely win in either situation.

Era frustrante porque antes yo tenía la oportunidad de ir a los Estados. Era como, va puedo ir. Y pues ya cuando no podía ir si fue feo porque no es que sólo como que yo, no es que a mi me gusten los Estados Unidos en particular, o no que esté enamorada de ese lugar, sino que yo quiero ir ahí o poder ir ahí porque está mi familia. Y ahora si no estuvieran ellos ahí no sería como tan grave no

poder ir ahí porque pues normal tienes todo el mundo. Pero si, yo quisiera poder ir a los Estados otra vez para ver a mi familia o que ellos vengan, pero nosotros no podemos. Ni yo ni ellos.

Losing her visa due to deportation meant that Isabel no longer had the ability to travel to and from the United States to see her mom and sister. Since her family in the U.S. is undocumented, they are also unable to travel to Guatemala to see her. Previously having the ability to travel to and from the United States made not being able to do so now especially frustrating. As her mom grows older, one of Isabel's biggest concerns is wondering if she will ever get to see her again.

Mothers

Mothers had to rely on their children's ability and desire to reunite with them during their brief visits to Guatemala. American born children were able to visit mothers in Guatemala, but their visits occurred less frequently than they would wish due to challenges unrelated to immigration enforcement. Here Beatriz describes how travel restrictions for her American born son had little to do with immigration enforcement and more to do with financial burdens and other responsibilities.

"Hay que saber balancear las cosas, le digo. Cuando uno tiene, y se puede, y no hay otras prioridades, uno dice, ok, yo me voy, me voy de viaje, voy a disfrutar, aunque sea un par de días con la familia verdad. Si se puede, porque si no se puede también, no se tiene el medio económico, no me voy a poder en deuda para hacer un viaje que después me va a mortificar y que lo tengo que pagar, le digo yo (chuckles)."

Beatriz's reunification with her son was shaped by a constant battle to balance the frequency of his visits with his financial means and work or school responsibilities. Because she always had her son's best interest in mind, the conversations they engaged in about visits and future plans for more permanent reunification always centered on ensuring that her son took care of his financial needs and met his personal goals while trying to find opportunities to see each other.

Retirees

For retirees, having made the decision to return to Guatemala as they grew older meant that they had to detach themselves from their adult children who were living in the U.S. Here Laurel describes the events that led up to her losing her permanent resident status which had previously allowed her to travel back and forth to visit her children.

> *"Entonces me llamaron, me llevaron la salita, me dijo el americano que porque yo tanto tiempo. Le dije yo que yo estoy enferma, estoy en mi casa allá y estoy contenta. Entonces me dijo, no vamos a hablar mucho, ¿usted quiere estar aquí en los Estados Unidos, o quiere perder la residencia? No tarde mucho tiempo, le dije quiero perder la residencia, quiero irme a Guatemala. La felicito, su decisión fue muy rápida. Puede estar el tiempo que quiere aquí en Houston, y se va cuando se va. Busca la embajada de Guatemala y dice que renuncia la residencia. Y si usted quiere de una vez va a tramitar su visa que usted no dejó ningún mal récord. Pero no, le dije yo a mis hijos, yo ya estuve allá, estuve con ustedes. Cuando ustedes quieren me vienen a ver, pero yo no deseo más viajar. Entonces así, entonces la perdí. Ahorita ya no soy residente de allá. Sí me sentí*

un poco triste porque se quedaron mis hijos, se quedaron mis nietos, mi nuera, los yernos, los señores [con los que trabajé]. Mi hijo a veces viene al año a veces viene a los 10 o 8 meses. La otra mi hija viene cada dos años, año y medio. Y la otra un poquito nada más, sí como ya tiene sus necesidades allá, sí ya no viene mucho.

Being interrogated and receiving the ultimatum from immigration services to make a decision on where she wanted to live meant that she had to decide between being able to visit her children or live a peaceful life in Guatemala to take care of her health. Beatriz chose to stay in Guatemala because while she enjoyed being able to see her children when she pleased, she also knew that it would be very expensive to manage her diabetes in the U.S. with the little money she received from social security. Similarly to mothers, remaining in Guatemala and losing her permanent residence meant that she could only see her children when they had time and were able to visit her. While it varied from child to child, with family and work responsibilities, their visits are few and far between, perhaps more so than mothers whose children were younger.

Travel restrictions related to immigration enforcement, financial burdens, and adult children's responsibilities often compounded the experience of family separation. In general, because the daughter's families who remained in the U.S. were undocumented, family reunification was made impossible in both directions due to barriers related to immigration enforcement. Daughters were unable to travel to the U.S. because they were deported or because obtaining a visa to visit the U.S. is nearly impossible for Guatemalans. Their family members were also unable to visit them in Guatemala because

doing so meant not being able to return to their lives in the U.S. For mothers and retirees, travel restrictions were much more associated with adult children's financial burdens as well as work and school responsibilities that made their ability to visit their mothers in Guatemala difficult. In most cases, mothers or retirees were either deported or had lost legal status in the U.S., making it impossible to visit their children. They therefore had to wait for their children to find opportunities to visit them.

JUDGEMENTS AND SOCIAL CLASHES

In many ways, women expressed feeling like strangers in their own country due to judgements and social clashes they experienced in their daily interactions with others. For purposes of clarity, I define judgements and social clashes as instances in which women felt or anticipated being judged for thinking, looking, or behaving differently than is accepted within Guatemalan cultural norms, especially as it related to their gender. While there were no clear generational commonalities in regard to judgements and social clashes, all participants reported that they often felt judged as women due to other's preconceived notions of who they were, sometimes labeled as whores, lesbians, or bad mothers. They felt like their values were different than everyone around them, placing them at odds with everything all the time. Social clashes not only included differences in values, but also traditions and holiday rituals as well as in daily social behaviors and expectations.

Rosita reported being hyper-sexualized, often receiving comments about the way she dressed and implications that living abroad meant she was sexually liberal, viewed as a "woman of the world."

"Las personas de acá tienen la perspectiva que porque uno vivió en el extranjero, porque estuvo en Estados Unidos que uno es una persona liberal. No, si ya estuviste allá ya experimentaste de todo. Si ya estuviste allá ya viste de todo. Entonces ellos tienen esa idea de que allá las cosas van más fuertes, van a un nivel más alto. Tal vez en la educación, pero donde se trata de violencia, crimen, y todo eso, depende mucho de uno. Si uno se involucró allá en todas esas cosas, las cosas que pasan acá no le sorprenden. Pero no todos somos así, no todos nos involucramos en ese ámbito. Entonces tenía mucho acoso, a veces era como que queriendo acercarse con tal de recibir algo a cambio sexual tal vez. Era, no, si ya estuviste allá ya viviste de todo. Pero no. O sea, tuve que prácticamente luchar contra eso, tratar de darme mi lugar y demostrar que no, no era como ellos lo pensaban.

Men's perceptions of Rosita as liberal made her a target of sexual harassment and sexual assault. The harassment was so intense that Rosita felt like she needed to prove everyone's assumptions about her wrong to gain the respect and a place in society that she deserved. As she later shared with me, Rosita was raped by someone she thought was her friend after going out with a group of coworkers one night. The sexual assault she experienced had a major impact on how she perceived her sense of belonging in Guatemala and shaped her direction for the rest of her life.

Similarly, Camila also felt like she was judged as a woman who seemed to shatter all gender norms without even intending to do so due to the extensively different values she grew accustomed to in the United States that created so many clashes with people in

Guatemala. Here she describes other's perceptions of her as a strange woman who abandoned her adult children only to be living alone in a small town in Guatemala.

> *"Decir aquí, yo soy feminista quiere decir yo soy puta, soy liberal, soy lesbiana, soy… de todo, soy suelta, soy fácil. Decir feminismo aquí es decir puta, suelta, fácil, loca, destrabada, no normal, porque la norma es seguir la tradición. Soy rara, especialmente donde estoy aquí en Cajolá, es otra cosa. Porque aquí ninguna mujer puede vivir sola en una casa. Y menos dejar a los hijos en otro lugar y venirse solita. Alguien dijo un día, yo no entiendo como usted pudo abandonar a sus hijos. Pero si mi hijo va a cumplir 40 años, tiene 39. Pero una madre jamás abandona a sus hijos. O sea, ese su papel de madre. Entonces un bien señalado, nunca me lo han dicho, pero yo me imagino que en su fondo yo soy rara. Entonces el término ese lesbiana, aunque estoy sola, no hay. No, pero sí soy rara verdad. Ya me dijeron que yo parecía medio revolucionaria, medio. Yo soy loca. Soy mala madre. Rara, loca, mala madre. Que más puede ser, ya conociendo. Si verdad, rara, loca, mala madre. Mas que todo medio chiflada, porque vivo sola. Y mala madre porque deje a mis bebes. Entonces quebrando vidrios ando yo."*

As a survivor of physical and sexual assault by her husband for decades, Camila's history with domestic violence in the U.S. was clearly extensive. It was through this context that Camila described herself as a feminist, having to rebuild her life from scratch and deeply analyzing the dynamics of her abuse and other forms of oppression through her studies. Therefore, when she returned to Guatemala, Camila did not just break one

gender norm, she broke many, which made her feel at odds with everything and everyone around her all the time. She was judged for being a bad mother regardless of how old and independent her children were. Although Camila expressed that people around her did not understand the term lesbian, she thought that everyone's perception of a woman like her living alone as something strange, because women in Guatemala do not live alone, they live with their husbands. Like Rosita, Camila felt that people's perceptions of her for having lived abroad or identifying as a feminist were that she was a whore, and while she joked about being revolutionary, perhaps in many respects she was.

Apart from gender-based judgements, my participants also felt broader social or cultural clashes in their everyday life. Clashes manifested themselves as constant inner conflict on whether to speak out about things that bothered them or keep it to themselves. Here Beatriz describes how simple incidents like seeing people throwing trash on the street created an internal conflict for her.

> *"En ese sentido si hay un poquito de choque con las tradiciones y obviamente la forma de pensar. Le digo a mi esposo, ay, a veces es muy difícil. Y cuando salgo acá, yo le decía a una amiga el otro día, yo no era así cuando yo vine pero yo aquí me he vuelto grosera. Pero porque la gente te hace que seas así. A mí me enoja que tiren la basura delante de uno. Y si uno les dice algo ellos son los enojados. Le digo a mi esposo yo cuando voy a caminar o voy a hacer cualquier cosa afuera, a mí eso me enoja. A veces mejor yo me limito porque me enoja que la gente sea así. Dice, ¡pero ya no te fijes en eso! Si, pero es que no me gusta, toda la vida ya de adulta no viví así, entonces me molestan esas acciones. O*

cuando la gente no respeta los espacios. Entonces yo he tenido que decir que no estoy de acuerdo y eso me hace ser grosera"

Beatriz's self-perception changed when she spoke up about things that bothered her, and others got angry at her. She began to believe she had become, or at least was perceived as, a rude person upon arriving in Guatemala. Her different way of thinking from people around her made her feel excluded from society. There seemed to be an internal battle on whether to speak up about things because they mattered to her or stay quiet to avoid being perceived as rude and angering others. Having lived in the U.S. most of her adult life, Beatriz became accustomed to certain American cultural norms which made it especially difficult to readjust to and fit into Guatemalan society.

Women encountered various judgements and social clashes upon their return to Guatemala. Some of them had to combat judgements related to gender norms that labeled them as bad mothers, whores, sexually liberal, and even lesbians. Other women battled more general judgements and social clashes daily, having to make decisions on whether to speak out for what they believed or keep the peace to avoid being judged. Cultural judgements and clashes had a much larger impact than discomfort for the women's lives. They had tangible physical and social implications for how they interacted with others and society, coming to an understanding that societal support was non-existent and that there were social consequences for speaking up against cultural norms. My participants felt like strangers in their own country, never fully feeling accepted by anyone around them.

FEELING LIKE A STRANGER WITH YOUR OWN FAMILY

Feeling like strangers was not only the case within Guatemalan society, but also in relation to reunification with family who remained in Guatemala. Having lived in the United States for many years meant that familial bonds were often deeply severed, and relationships had to be rebuilt and mended. My participants had the difficult task to mend relationships with siblings, aunts, and cousins, and even children left behind when they migrated to the U.S. While they saw returning to Guatemala as an opportunity to get to know family they had not seen in decades, finding the familiarity and comfort that initially expected from the experience proved false, especially at first. The longing for the intoxicating feeling of reunification they imagined all along flattened as they noticed feeling like they met a good friend instead of a close relative. Women also came to the realization that reunification with the family they had left behind would require very deep and difficult work to mend broken bonds. Similarly to societal judgements and clashes, my participants felt judged by their family members for having different viewpoints or dressing differently.

Lee recalls feeling like the extended family she reunited with did not care about her the way her parents did. She felt judged by her family for the way she dressed and spoke, as well as for the friends she kept.

> *"With my parents I could literally be me, and they love me. You know what I mean, I didn't have to be anyone else. I didn't have to be the image that they wanted me to be, I could be just myself and they were happy with me. So it was different. It was a big change from being pampered, from being pampered to just*

being the third option. Like, es como que, what do you want? When I used to be the first one to be asked, I mean, it changed. The clothes didn't fit me here. They were too small. And then my aunt, she started giving away my [things] cuz she's like that. And she gave away my shoes, she gave away my lipstick, my makeup. Supposedly they would all get lost, but no, she would give it away. She would take it and give it away. I had to get out of there. I couldn't be there no more. I was there for about a year. Then I moved out, and then I went to move separately my first time living alone. Mi mamá pegó el grito al cielo. She was like are you freaking kidding me. And I'm like I can't be here! And then I got used to people and I made friends, and my aunt didn't like that or my uncle. They would call my mom and tell her that, I'm telling you I know what kind of people I hang out with, and those were normal people. There were like, no que they were like, gang bangers or this and that, cuz they were people that came from the States. So you know most of us we all have tattoos, and we're all different, we all dress differently, we talk English, and so they didn't like that. I hate her, I don't like my aunt. Me hizo tanto daño while I was here. I don't like people telling me what to do, when I know I'm not doing something bad, you know. I couldn't even have this, you being here talking to me, cuz I would have my aunt like what are you doing? Where my grandma like, what are you talkin about? Speak Spanish, you don't need to talk in English, why don't you need me to understand you?"

It was difficult for Lee to lose the deep love she felt from her parents upon her deportation and having to live with extended family that did not express themselves

similarly with her. Instead, Lee felt like she had to constantly defend and protect herself against her family's preconceived notions and judgements about her and her friends, as well as behaviors that deeply impacted her physical and emotional well-being. Her family perceived her as hanging with the wrong crowd and being secretive. She was not free to speak English, a language she felt an ease of expression with, and which made her feel somewhat closer to the culture she left behind in the United States. She needed to get away from her extended family in Guatemala and live on her own to find a sense of peace upon her return.

Maria came to the crude realization that her relationship with the son she left behind in Guatemala when he was just two years old needed mending. Here she describes how she and her husband both noticed that their relationship with their son required special attention and when they realized the extent of the sense of abandonment that he felt years after their return when it all came to the surface.

> *"Fue difícil cuando nos encontramos aquí con el, no podernos comunicar tan fácilmente como lo hacíamos con los otros tres niños, o con los dos verdad. Ya 6 años y 4 años, ya es muy diferente. El no tenía los mismos pensamientos que los otros chiquitos. Ellos habían crecido con nosotros, cuatro años pero si quedan marcando en la vida de ellos. Entonces el no tenía la misma confianza. Poco a poco creo, con el tiempo el ya se fue más que todo adaptando a nosotros y nosotros a él. Porque nos costó, nos costó bastante adaptarnos a él, y el adaptarse a nosotros."*

At first it seemed like all they needed was a readjustment period where the family could get to know each other after being separated for so long. While this was a difficult task for everyone, Maria felt like they were making progress as her son began to gain trust in them and they began building a deeper relationship, something she had longed for during all the years she spent in the U.S. However, time passed, and it became apparent that there were parts of their son's experience that were still left unprocessed, as conflicts came to the surface when her son began expressing a deep sense of abandonment.

> *"Creció mi niño verdad, y más o menos tenía 4 años que habíamos regresado, ha sido los más difícil porque, volvieron los problemas con él. Yo pienso que tal vez era él porque después yo hablé mucho con él, por todo lo que lo habíamos dejado. El tenía sus sentimientos como que ¿por qué lo abandonamos? ¿por qué lo dejamos? ¿porque teníamos más prioridad con los otros niños? Empezaron como que, tal vez el cómo le explicara yo, el decirle al papá él se preocupaba más por el otro hijo, el segundo que por él. Le ponían más atención al otro que a él. Entonces empezó como que una rivalidad con el otro niño, el tercero. Entonces ellos peleaban mucho por eso. Se veía muy marcado de que decía él que (su papá) prefería más al otro niño que a él. Entonces empezó haber nuevamente el rechazo, tal vez pienso yo, todo ese resentimiento que él tenía de pequeño. El empezó ya muchos años después como que que se vio más marcado el resentimiento de porque lo habíamos dejado. Si me recuerdo de que en ese tiempo él se enamoró. Se enamoró de una niña verdad. Entonces todo venía bien verdad. Y al poco tiempo él empezó a cambiar mucho, él empezó a cambiar mucho en*

todo aspecto, en su estado de ánimo, en su carácter, en todo. Empezó a cambiar bastante."

Now approximately 16 years old, Maria's son had many questions about why they left him. He felt like they did not love him like they loved their other children, and sibling rivalries and fights began to take hold of the family dynamic. Maria shared that these issues continued for some time as their son's character began to change and he became more rebellious, seeking love and acceptance in a romantic relationship. Conflicts intensified and went unresolved as Maria and her husband made the mistake of threatening their son with sending him to live with his grandparents if he did not shape up his behavior. The ultimatum resulted in rehashing the old abandonment wound that their son had, and he made the decision to run away with his girlfriend instead of going to live with his grandparents. They became estranged for several years before they had other opportunities to mend their relationship. The entire process was very painful for Maraia and she recalls learning many lessons about how much unintentional harm this caused her son.

Camila also had the experience of feeling severed family ties when she returned to Guatemala. Here she explains that because she traveled to the U.S in her early 20's and spent over 40 years away, reunification with her family was not the euphoric experience she expected.

"Perdí 41 años de vida junto con ellos. O sea, la euforia principal cuando vine era una cosa, ahora que yo vengo, yo no los conozco. Porque si los conocía por carta, por hola, por qué, pero no por convivencia. Hasta ahora yo estoy conociendo a mi

familia. Y también en lo negativo de esto es que yo para ellos todavía sigo siendo extranjera. Y tienen razón, porque yo no crecí con ellos. Yo dejé a mi hermana creo que de 12 años. Cuando yo regresé que la vine a visitar y ahora que vengo mi hermana va a cumplir 50 años[...] Lo negativo también fue, aunque no fue ahorita mismo, cuando vi a mi mamá, después de más de 16 años de que no la había visto no sentí lo mismo. Fue Cómo darle un abrazo a una amiga. Esa pasión, ese amor, y ese amor inolvidable a la madre, todo ese sentimiento que se habla, yo no lo sentí. No sé si fue por todo el proceso de mi vida, por lo que pase, por los años que deje de continuar. No sé si soy yo la que estoy haciendo franca o es la gente hipócrita que dice que ese sentimiento siempre es inolvidable. Tengo mi duda, tengo mi duda porque yo sentí a mi mamá no como mi madre"

Camila describes her time living in the U.S. as time lost with her family. The physical distance led to emotional distance that made her feel unrecognizable and unfamiliar to her family and they to her. Despite her efforts to keep in touch through cards and telephone calls, Camila was a stranger to them. She also describes being unable to feel the unforgettable and unbreakable motherly bond everyone always speaks about. Instead of having the euphoric experience of being reunited with her mother after 16 years of not seeing each other, Camila described it more as an unsatisfying feeling, as if her mother were a friend instead. Camila perceived a discrepancy that made her question what everyone was referring to regarding a motherly bond. She seemed to question if people were lying or if she simply incapable of having those feelings for herself. Her

severed family ties were another way in which Camila felt like a stranger upon her return, feeling like she could not readjust to society or integrate into her own family.

Women returning to Guatemala experience various challenges. Primarily, it appeared that all women struggled with the complexities of family separation. While family separation was at times a consequence of deportation, it was also a conscious and purposeful choice for some of my participants. Additionally, family separation was compounded by travel restrictions that made it difficult or impossible to travel to and from the United States to visit their children due to immigration enforcement, financial burdens or work responsibilities. Having spent many years immersed in American culture, women also struggled with being judged through cultural gender norms or experiencing social clashes due to their different points of view. Similarly to feeling like strangers in their own country, women also felt like strangers with their own family living in Guatemala. Women expressed feeling judged by extended family members for the way they dressed and spoke. Additionally, they felt a deep sense of disconnect with parents or children they had left behind in Guatemala due to severed family bonds that they had to work to mend. However, despite the hardships women endured through the challenges outlined in this chapter, the majority of my participants also saw opportunities to grow and build more meaningful lives in Guatemala.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, I engage current literature on return migration with the results of my study. In some cases, my results corroborate current literature, and therefore I simply add examples of the ways in which my participants' experiences are similar to that of other returnees of other genders or from other countries. Other times, I add information about how my participants' experiences may differ or offer additional insight to the work of other scholars. I then engage in a discussion about the generational narrative analysis I conducted, taking into consideration how returnee women's experiences are influenced by their identities and roles as daughters, mothers, and retirees. Finally, I discuss the implications that the results of my study have on the field of social work, including social and mental health services.

Motives of Return

Migrants' motives for return have been well analyzed and categorized in return migration literature. As was described in the literature review section of this thesis, voluntary returnees often return for reasons associated with economic difficulty or readiness as well as family circumstances. Additionally, it is understood that unlike voluntary returnees, forced migrants to return to their countries of origin due to State-mandated orders like deportation or loss of visa status. My data suggests that migrant women return to Guatemala for similar reasons and with varying degrees of agency as has been documented with other populations in return migration research. All but one of my participants who were voluntary returnee women who shared their stories with me

returned to Guatemala due to reasons associated with violent incidents in the United States, family crises, or the economic circumstances of their retirement. Using the returnee categories of Durand (2004), I would consider only Angelina to be a returnee driven by the market economy. She expressed that she returned to Guatemala because she felt like she had met her economic goals of saving enough money to build a house, in which she was living with her husband and children at the time of our interview. Unlike Angelina, Maria and her husband were victims of a crime in the United States and ultimately decided to return to Guatemala to reunite with their 12-year-old son they had left in Guatemala 10 years prior. Rosita's decision to return involved a family crisis in which her sister, who had a schizophrenia diagnosis, was sexually assaulted in her own home in Guatemala. Because her mom had a newborn baby in the United States, Rosita volunteered to return to Guatemala to care for and support her sister. As Wheatley (2017) would say, Maria and Rosita were driven to return by the gift economy, seeing the necessity of family reunification and obligations.

In accordance with Cerase's (1974) categories of retired returnees, my sample included two women who lived and worked in the United States for 20 to 40 years, comprising the majority of their adult lives. As legal permanent residents, both Camila and Laurel were driven to return by the social and economic circumstances of their retirement, realizing their retirement pensions would not suffice in meeting their expenses while living in the United States, especially in cities where the cost of living is very high. Additionally, both Camila and Laurel expressed not wanting to be a burden in their

children's lives as they became older, especially because their children lived very busy lives. Therefore, in their perspective, they made the decision to return to Guatemala to live more independent and more financially feasible lives.

According to Durand (2004) and Wheatly (2017), Beatriz, Nataly, and Lee would all fit the definitions of returning to Guatemala under forced conditions or driven by the State. While only Lee was placed in detention for a short period of time, all three women were asked to sign voluntary departure or deportation proceedings that ordered them to return to Guatemala after a predetermined time frame or to regularly report to immigration enforcement. While Nataly was only given 30 days, Lee was given six months to prepare for her return. Beatriz, however, was given an indefinite amount of time to sell her belongings, including her car and her house, before she and her son had to return to Guatemala to reunite with her husband who had been deported.

AGENCY

As Wheatly (2017) argues, returnees, both voluntary and forced, have varying degrees of agency in their return and reintegration processes. As my participants' stories illustrate, the reasons for their return and reintegration processes were influenced by a combination of State influences, socioeconomic factors, as well as community and family ties in Guatemala and the U.S. Although women who were deported had limited choices in the context of their return, they were able to engage their economic and social resources to help them in their return and reintegration processes. Conversely, while some of my participants are considered voluntary returnees, the context of their return

often involved stressful family crises or economic hardships that had major influences and implications in the reasons for return and reintegration experiences.

Because Beatriz, Nataly, and Lee were either never placed in detention or were released from detention after signing voluntary departure documents, all of them shared with me that they considered going into hiding instead of obeying their deportation orders at one point or another in their process. However, they all ultimately decided to return to Guatemala because they did not want to live in the shadows for the rest of their lives. While it is true that their choices were few and limited, the thought process involved in making this decision demonstrates agency nonetheless, Lee explained that after having conversations with close family members about hiding from immigration enforcement, she realized doing so would mean she would never be free. For Nataly and Beatriz, their strong desire to reunite with family members who had either always lived in Guatemala or had also been deported was a major influence in ultimately deciding to return.

While the women who were deported had limited choices about the circumstances and time frames of their return, they all engaged their social networks in Guatemala and the United States, including parents, friends, and extended family as sources of support. While Beatriz and Nataly had parents still living in Guatemala who supported them during their return and reintegration, Lee relied on her parents living in the United States to help her financially and emotionally. Having lived and worked in the U.S. for over 20 years, Beatriz and her husband also used the financial resources they had acquired to help establish a business in Antigua upon their return.

While the decision to return and the circumstances surrounding voluntary returnees are often associated with a strong level of agency, factors outside of their control influenced many of my participants to return to Guatemala regardless of how ready they were or how much they desired to do so. Despite Maria and Rosita expressing that returning to Guatemala was their decision, they both felt a sense of regret for leaving the United States because doing so meant lost economic advancement and educational opportunities. Both Maria and Rosita returned to Guatemala after they or a member of their family experienced violent crimes either in the U.S. or in Guatemala. They returned to be reunited with family members left in Guatemala over many years and needed their help and support. Similarly, while Angelina was generally happy with her decision to return, she expressed that during times of economic hardship or when she had conflicts with some of her coworkers who she often supervised, she did have thoughts of migrating to the U.S. once again. However, these thoughts were often fleeting and momentary, as she was happy to be with her family in her community of origin. Angelina explained that she did not feel judged by the people around her because they saw her as a success story, having gone to the U.S. to work hard to meet her goals but did not forget to return to her roots.

Finally, based on my findings, I believe retired returnees exercised the most agency in their decisions to return and reintegration processes than other participants. Although Cerase states that retiree returnees are of little consequence to society, Laurel and especially Camila had much influence on the people and communities around them

upon their return. As older women, choosing to live alone broke many traditional Guatemalan gender norms that often have much influence and consequence in society. Additionally, both women were beloved and respected by their extended families, neighbors, and/or community, and thus were very influential women. Camila was especially deeply engaged in a community organization that provided training and employment opportunities to women in Guatemala. As a former teacher in the United States, she also volunteered her time to tutor children in her community and even adopted a child who had experienced homelessness a few years prior. In fact, retired returnees like Laurel and Mariana are of much consequence to Guatemalan society. While retired returnees may see returning as the start of their last stage of life, their community engagement was proof of their agency to make meaning of their return.

TRANSNATIONALISM

As previously stated, returnees often engaged their social networks in the U.S. and Guatemala to help them with their return and reintegration processes. Young returnees like Nataly, Lee and Rosita, who were both just 18 years old at the time of their return, relied on transnational relationships with family living in the U.S. to help their reintegration processes. All three of them explained that they communicate with their family in the United States on a regular basis through messaging applications like WhatsApp. However, while some of them expressed growing distance between them and their parents, Lee described still having a very close relationship with both of her parents despite the physical distance that her deportation created between them. She explained

that her parents have not only supported her financially during difficult times, but also give her guidance when she needs it the most.

In ways different from daughters, I also found transnationalism to play a major role in mothers' return experience in several ways. Because Beatriz's meaning making revolved to a great extent around her role as a mother, transnational relationships for her did not only entail receiving support from friends living in the U.S., but also providing support to her American citizen son who returned to the United States at the age of 12 after attempting to live in Guatemala with his parents for two years. As a returnee mother separated from her child, Beatriz used her relationships with friends in the United States to meet the needs of her son, including housing, education, emotional and moral support, and guidance. Despite the distance, Beatriz described her relationship with her son to be very positive and close, so much so that her son's struggles, joys well-being became her own. However, keeping a transnational relationship with her son limited Beatriz from fully reintegrating to Guatemalan society because her intention was always to reunite with him in the U.S., instead of readjusting to life in Guatemala. More than any other participant in my study, Beatriz desired and planned to eventually reunite with her son in the U.S.

REINTEGRATION

Because various factors such as age of migration, time spent living in the U.S., the strength of familial and social networks in the U.S., and country of origin, among others, influence returnees' perspectives, some returnees have more difficulty with reintegrating

into their country of origin. Thus, my data corroborated the argument presented by Roberts et. al (2017), showing that returnees who migrated to the U.S. when they were young girls had a more difficult time readjusting to living in Guatemala upon returning. Additionally, mothers who were deported and separated from their children had an equally if not harder time making meaning of their return and reintegration experiences. However, while Roberts et. al argued that forced returnees have fewer opportunities to engage their transnational networks, and thus had more difficulty during their return and reintegration, my participants' experiences demonstrate that adjustment difficulties did not have so much to do with them being voluntary or forced returnees, but much more to do with the familial and social connections they had left behind in the United States.

As part of my research, I sought to learn about the types of social services that my participants relied on upon their return. However, when I inquired about the topic of governmental assistance, all of my participants expressed that they did not receive any aid from any governmental institution and believe that such aid did not exist. According to Gramajo Bauer's (2019c) research, my participants' lack of knowledge could be due to their geographical distance from the capital, but it could also be due to lack of outreach by governmental organizations to the people they aim to serve. Therefore, apart from Gramajo's recommendations suggesting that governmental institutions center their services in the highlands instead of in Guatemala City, I would add that governmental entities must execute more effective and proactive outreach efforts to inform returnees and their families of the services they can offer.

Among a long list of governmental and non-governmental organizations that provide services to returnees in Guatemala, Gramajo Bauer (2019c) presents information about several organizations that I had opportunities to visit through my own research and network of people, including Asociación de Retornados Guatemaltecos (ARG), Desarrollo Sostenible para Guatemala (Desgua), and Grupo Cajola. Additionally, I visited Colectivo Vida Digna (Vida Digna) which was not included in Gramajo Bauer's list. ARG is an organization of Guatemalan returnees that offers national and international calls, as well as aid to pay for transportation costs for returnees upon arrival. Similarly, Desgua and Grupo Cajola, are led and operated by returnees who seek to create financial and education alternatives to migration. While Desgua has focused on providing cooking classes to young chefs and employment opportunities to recent returnees, Grupo Cajola, has focused on training and employment opportunities in woodworking and weaving as well as providing educational and child care services for their employee's children. Vida Digna's focus is on helping reunify children and their families after migration and forced return to Guatemala as well as supporting them in their reintegration processes by providing spiritual guidance and resource assistance.

While I did not come in contact with governmental organizations providing services to returnees, I observed the passion and drive with which the non-governmental organizations provided financial and emotional support to recent and more established returnees, strengthening each other as their networks expanded. Because women's level of success and satisfaction with reintegration had much to do with the connections they

made upon returning to Guatemala, meeting other returnees through such organizations created a network of support for each other. I found that these networks worked similarly to Gutierrez's (2017) findings on young deported men who met each other in immigrant detention centers and helped each other through their return and reintegration processes. While none of my participants were happy or satisfied 100% of the time, especially when they felt judged or experienced social clashes, many of them created small pockets of support with other returnees, both women and men, who helped them feel a sense of belonging. In addition to community organizations like the ones listed above, women, especially daughters, frequently met other returnees in the call centers where they worked, or in churches where they worshiped together.

Generational Analysis

Women's reintegration experiences were largely influenced by the role they played within their family and society. Daughters described a type of awakening at having to navigate Guatemalan society at an early age without their parents as their main sources of support, especially when they encountered the judgments of others that labeled them as promiscuous or troublemakers. Mothers struggled to make meaning of their return to Guatemala due to a feeling deep sense of loss from being separated from their American citizen children or experienced severe relationship conflicts with their children who stayed in Guatemala while they lived in the U.S. Retirees felt a disconnect between themselves and their close family members remaining in Guatemala as well as society as a whole due to their prolonged absences from Guatemala.

Family separation

I found that for my participants, the decision to return or separate from family members was often based on considerations for the well-being of everyone in their family. For younger women who had agency outside of the mandates of the State, their role as eldest daughters implied that they had to take into consideration the well-being of their siblings and sacrificed future educational and employment opportunities to support their parents and siblings. However, daughters returning to Guatemala at young ages missed the love, guidance, and sense of safety provided by their parents. For mothers, returning was at times influenced by their need to reunite with children left behind who needed their love and guidance. However, other times they realized that returning to Guatemala with their American citizen children caused unintended emotional and mental hardships. In cases where American citizen children experienced difficulties adjusting to Guatemalan society, mothers ultimately decided to send their children back to the U.S. to ensure their well-being, causing family separation and stressful situations for mothers. Mothers feel a sense of loss at not being able to support the children who returned to the U.S. but attempted to do so from afar through transnational relationships. Similarly, retirees chose to separate from adult children living in the U.S. to avoid feeling like a burden to them.

Travel restrictions

Family separation was compounded by travel restrictions regardless of the generational status of returnee women. Due to border restrictions and immigration enforcements, daughters were unable to visit parents in the U.S. Not having a visa to

travel back to and from the United States meant that daughters went many years, even decades without seeing their parents living abroad, often wondering if they would ever see their aging parents again. For mothers travel restrictions associated with their deportations or lack of travel visas meant that they had to rely on their American Citizen children to travel to Guatemala to see them, which was often dependent on financial and work constraints. Similar to mothers, retirees relied on their children's desire and ability to travel to see them. However, because retirees had adult children who also had family responsibilities apart from financial and work constraints, their visits may be fewer and more far between than mothers.

Judgements and social clashes

Reintegration into Guatemalan society, especially with regards to judgements and social clashes was also influenced by returnee women's and gender and age. Daughters were perceived as hypersexualized due to others' preconceived notions about American women's sexual liberation. Having lived in the United States made others think that young women were sexually liberal or more sexually experienced, causing sexual harassment and sexual assault. Mothers experienced more general social clashes, having to find a balance between speaking out about things that bothered them or staying quiet to keep the peace and avoid being judged. This was especially relevant to their gender, as speaking out was traditionally seen as breaking gender norms. Retirees also experienced judgements and social clashes related to their gender, especially when others perceived

them as strange because they chose to live alone or labeled as bad mothers for "abandoning" their adult children.

Feeling like strangers with their own families

Finally, returnee women also experienced difficulties reintegrating to their families still living in Guatemala. Daughters expressed being judged as troublemakers by their extended family for having tattoos or keeping other returnees as friends. Additionally, they were perceived to be secretive when they spoke English to others over the phone and were frequently asked to only speak Spanish. Mothers who had left children in Guatemala struggled with reconnecting, re-establishing their parental role, and re-build trust with them. Mothers had to process years of resentment with their children before repairing severed ties could be successful. Similarly, due to prolonged absence that lasted 20 to 40 years, retiree women experienced deep disconnect between them and close family members. Having been gone for so long made reunification with family members feel like they were strangers instead of their parents and siblings.

HEALTH & WELL-BEING

As addressed by Morris et. al (2017), because health includes the physical, mental, and social well-being of an individual, social, political, and economic conditions must be taken into consideration when thinking about the health and well-being of returnees. As demonstrated by Gramajo Bauer (2019), returnees experience stress associated with difficulties in finding employment opportunities to provide for

themselves and their families, as well as having difficulties in reintegrating to family living in Guatemala. The results of my study on returnee women's experiences corroborated the results of the pilot study conducted by Morris et. al, as well as Gramajo Bauer's (2019b) research on the reintegration processes of returnees, suggesting that difficulties with stress, social isolation, family reintegration, as well as structural violence contribute to health challenges. Adding to the existing research on the impacts of return on health and well-being of returnees, I aim to address the specific social stressors that impact returnee women.

First, women experienced social isolation and exclusion due to societal judgements of them as migrants as well as returnee women. As migrants, people's misconceptions of them included perceiving their experiences of living in the U.S. as completely lacking challenges, limiting their ability to share negative experiences or process their grief. As Camila shared, returnees often feel shame and embarrassment about sharing their feelings associated with their migratory journey and return experiences. Additionally, younger women also reported feeling judged by others for having tattoos or speaking English, as they were associated with gangs or attempting to be secretive by not speaking Spanish. As migrants, the public's stereotypes of them made returnee women feel isolated from Guatemalan society.

As returnee women, people's misconceptions of them included being perceived as sexually promiscuous or easy, which often made them vulnerable to sexual harassment and sexual assault. Expressing feminist ideologies or objecting to traditional gender

norms in which they were expected to serve and obey men often caused women to be expelled from social circles of experience verbal backlashed from community and even family members. Additionally, women struggled with grappling with the differences between cultural gender norms in the U.S. and Guatemala, especially when it related to navigating social services and systems. Feeling like outsiders in the community and within their own family, as well as feeling discriminated and betrayed by social systems they relied on as women, made my participants experience depression symptoms and at times suicidal ideation.

Family separation also impacted women's health and well-being on a very deep level. Because younger women were separated from their parents at the brink of adulthood, they struggled with reintegrating to Guatemalan society without any guidance. The stress of finding themselves in country they had not been in since they were young children made them feel lonely and isolated, especially with the intersections of the societal judgments described above. For mothers, family separation caused feelings of guilt about not being able to support and guide their American citizen children from afar. In other cases, mothers experience severe physical and mental health challenges due to having to re-establish themselves as parental figures in the lives of children they had left behind in Guatemala years before to their return.

IMPLICATIONS

Because my findings demonstrate the social challenges of returnee women, my work contributes to the practice of international social work and human services in

Guatemala. As Gramajo Baurer (2019c) argues, Guatemalan governmental institutions have historically focused on the intake of returnees during deportation proceedings, neglecting the reintegration processes and needs of forced and voluntary returnees. While she suggested that more emphasis should be given on the social reintegration of returnees, my results focus specifically on the needs of returnee women. It has become apparent that Guatemalan society holds many misconceptions and stereotypes about migrants and returnees that often impact the health and well-being of returnee women. Therefore, it is not only necessary to establish social programs and services that aim to meet women's needs, but also work to advocate to broader social changes related to U.S. immigration laws.

As Gramajo Bauer (2019b) explained, most social services are currently located in Guatemala City although the majority of returnees reside in the highlands. I agree with her recommendations that governmental institutions must reallocate resources to establish services in cities like Xela or in departments where the population of returnees is high. However, based on historical government repression in Guatemala, it is highly unlikely that efforts to assist returnees will be improved out of the government's initiatives. As I gathered information from my participants, it appeared that they received more support and assistance from non-governmental institutions that have been working on family reunification and alternatives to migration efforts for several years. Through their connections with social workers or community organizers in the U.S., several of the organizations that I came in contact were established as fiscally sponsored American non-

profit organizations. Therefore, I believe that future efforts to assist women with reintegration processes will involve continued support of non-governmental organizations through connections in the U.S.

Camila's reflections on the silence about migrant's psychological processes showed significant insights about the lack of emotional support and mental health services available to returnees. Because the public's perception is that migrants' lives in the U.S. were much easier than life in Guatemala, returnees may feel shame and embarrassment about sharing their emotions related to their migratory journeys and reintegration experiences. Therefore, I believe returnees, including returnee women, would benefit from social programs that incorporate mental health services to help process their emotions with other returnees. As Camila mentioned, group therapy or support groups may be the most effective setting in helping normalize the expression of feelings of shame and embarrassment for returnees. However, care must be taken to provide opportunities for women to process their own experiences as they intersect with their gender and returnee status. Because most migrants and returnees are men, it may prove challenging to gather women in group therapy or support groups especially because women often want to avoid being associated as returnees.

Finally, whether voluntary or involuntary, return can often also have negative implications on the well-being of families, especially as it relates to family separation and challenges to reunification. In order to help returnee women better reintegrate into Guatemalan society, I believe efforts are necessary both in the U.S. and in Guatemala.

First, it is necessary for social workers to advocate for the dismantling of current practices that separate children from their families, including family separation practices conducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Additionally, the foster care system must be restructured so that American citizen children of deported immigrants can be reunited with their parents after deportation. As Zayas (2015) explains, American citizen children of deported migrants become "deportation orphans" or "exiled citizens" due to their parents' deportation, and each situation brings special emotional, social, and economic challenges to families and society. American citizen children who return to the U.S after failed attempts to integrate into their parents' country of origin require special assistance to navigate social systems without their parents.

Additionally, returnee mothers and their American citizen children struggle with the meaning and functionality of their transnational relationships. Children feel anger and resentment toward American society for taking their parents' love and guidance during their formative years. Mothers feel deep anguish and guilt about not being able to support their children from afar. Additionally, returnee women also need assistance to reintegrate into their families, including children and parents, that were left behind in Guatemala when they migrated to the U.S. Family therapy or resolution work in which women and their families have opportunities to express and process feelings of abandonment, resentment, guilt, and estrangement may be beneficial in helping to mend broken bonds with children and close family members they had not seen in years.

CONCLUSION

Throughout my work in this thesis, I have contributed to broadening return migration research and scholarship to include the experiences of women. By providing a generational analysis through the three categories of returnee women, "daughters," "mothers," and "retirees," I hope to have given the reader a glimpse of the social challenges that women face upon returning to Guatemala. While returnee women face many of the same social challenges with reintegration that returnee men experience, their gender also plays a major role in the way they make meaning of their return. Facing various forms of social stigma, returnee women struggle with finding a sense of belonging in Guatemalan society and are often unable to fully reintegrate. Based on my findings, I shared the implications that the social challenges women face have on their overall well-being and mental health. Additionally, I shared recommendations on the types of social services and assistance that returnee women need to more fully reintegrate into Guatemalan society.

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